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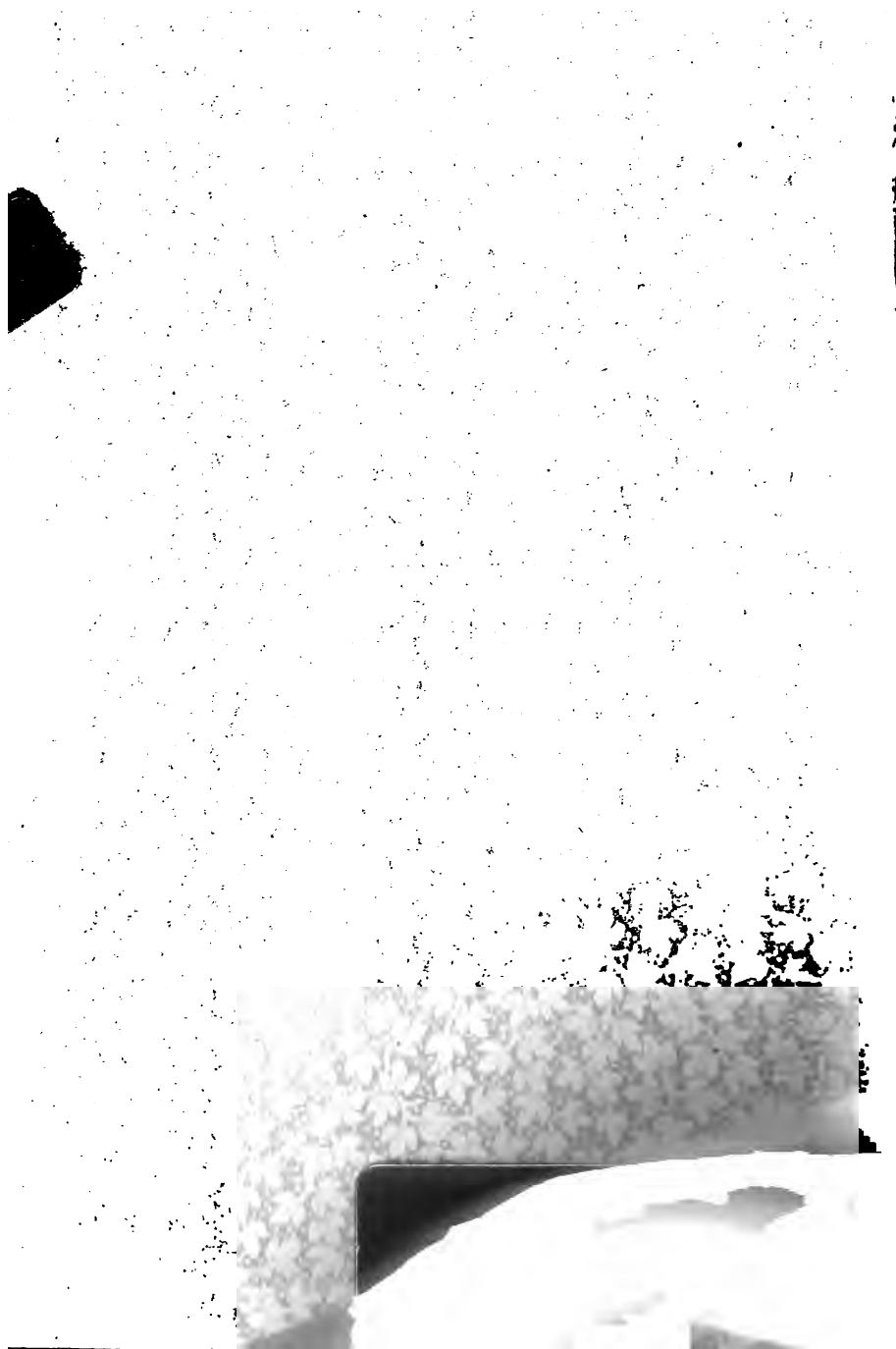
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D. S. O. H.,
the Queen.

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HONEST DAVIE.

A Fable.

BY

FRANK BARRETT,

AUTHOR OF

'LIEUTENANT BARNABAS,' 'A PRODIGAL'S PROGRESS,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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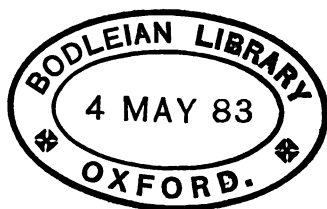
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HONEST DAVIE.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH GEORGE FALKLAND SPEAKS FOR
HIMSELF.

THE political events of '92 compelling English residents to quit Montpellier, my father and I went to Florence ; and there in the following year he died, to my extreme sorrow, for it seemed to me that the place he had filled in my heart must now be for ever vacant.

I had been a gentleman commoner at Oxford but six months, when my mother

died, and my father withdrew me ; for it was then that, falling sick of the lingering complaint which never afterwards left him, he felt the necessity of having a young and lively companion to amuse him and perform those services which he could not endure from a paid servant. It was a misfortune for me, which, despite the natural affection of a son, I felt severely at the time ; for I had entered the University, like most young fellows, full of ambitious hopes, and counted upon taking honours and fitting myself for some public office which I hoped my uncle—Lord Kestral—would obtain for me. My father had quarrelled with his brother, and declared that no one ever got anything but promises from his lordship, for the very simple reason that he had nothing else to give. And this, as I found later on, was substantially true. My uncle, when a young man, had bought a seat in Parliament of

Lord Bute ; and by dint of serving that unscrupulous Minister indefatigably and spending his money lavishly in corrupting his venal adversaries, he had been counted among the number of the King's friends, and been rewarded with a title. But with the fall of Bute in '63, Lord Kestral lost his seat in Parliament, and with it all hope of obtaining a place from his Majesty, whom he could no longer serve, so that he was left with nothing in exchange for the fortune he had wasted but his patent of nobility. My father equally derided the projects I formed of obtaining eminence in physic or law. 'Why should you trouble your head about such stuff?' he would ask. 'Cannot you leave the professions to the poor devils who have to adopt them for their livelihood? You know as much Greek and Latin as is necessary to a gentleman ; then why not rest content with that position?' But, indeed,

these appeals to my reason had less effect upon my mind than his invocation of my affection had upon my heart ; and seeing how weak and dependent his malady rendered him, I should have been wanting in every sentiment of filial love and duty to have left him alone for my own selfish ends. He was ever most indulgent and kind to me, though at times he was naturally irritable and impatient ; he denied me nothing which I had a mind to, and seemed never better pleased than when he found me amusing myself with the harpsichord, a book of plays, or a bit of wood-carving, to which art I was always vastly attached. Seeing me engaged in these trivial pleasures, he possibly felt assured that I had abandoned all thoughts of taking to a serious career and leaving him. In truth I found it easy enough after awhile to be idle, and fell quietly into the manner of living which he thought most

desirable ; in due course I became a very indolent, careless young gentleman, with no particularly vicious inclinations, nor any of a remarkably virtuous sort. For six years my father and I were never separated for a day together ; in the early part we lived at my father's house in Kent, the latter part of the time was spent at Montpellier and Florence ; but from the first to the last he never said a word to me of his pecuniary circumstances. He avoided the subject, as also did I ; for never having felt the want of money, I never knew the value of it, and I was fully as indifferent to the future as I was to the past. By a word now and then my father led me to suppose—though I do not think he wilfully intended to deceive me—that I should have a sufficient competency at his death ; my surprise may be imagined, therefore, when, his affairs being set in order by a lawyer, I found that Falkland Hall,

which had been in the family from the time it was built in 1664, had been secretly sold to discharge a mortgage, and that there remained of my father's fortune no more than a few hundred pounds for me to begin life with. The concealment of this fact was but a phase of my father's affection, for he clearly would have had no reserve but for the dread of my going away to seek my fortune. Not for one moment did I regret this change of condition ; though I admit I felt sorry to think the old house which had been my home, and of which I was properly proud—for it is as charming a dwelling-house as one may wish to see—was sold and gone into strange hands. Indeed, it somewhat mitigated my sorrow in the loss of my father, by giving my thoughts a new turn, and inspiring my mind with fresh hopes, and I know not what feelings beside. I was not past the age of romance, and the

notion of encountering hardships and overcoming difficulties in my struggle for eminence was as great an incentive to the undertaking as the perils of a voyage are to the hardy adventurer upon strange seas.

My chief trouble was that which is oft reported of fabulous heroes at first starting—the difficulty of determining which road should be taken in the search for fame and fortune; and as they, in most cases, took their direction from a puff of wind, so was I content to be guided by that which is not one whit more substantial—namely, the breath of flattery.

I had become acquainted with some very pretty young gentlemen artists in Florence, and daily spent some hours with them in their studio. Amongst them there were two or three learning the art of sculpture, and having, as I have said, a particular fancy for carving, and the like, nothing pleased me better than

to watch them modelling of heads and figures in clay and wax. From watching, I got to imitating them, and having procured a piece of soft wax and taken it home, I privily modelled my father's head in *basso-relievo*; and was so well satisfied with my work, that I took it to the studio and quietly stood it upon a shelf, where works were deposited for the master's inspection.

'Who did this?' he asked, taking up my work and looking at it.

None of the pupils replied, and I considered it wise to hold my tongue, for I feared every moment he was about to burst out laughing at it, being particularly severe at times upon bad work.

'Who did this?' he repeated.

One after another the pupils excused themselves, and it was coming to my turn to speak, when he said, with a caustic sneer:

'You need not trouble yourselves, gentle-

men, to disown this work; I was wrong to ask the question, for I perceive clearly 'tis none of your handicraft. The man who modelled this is a genius.'

I do not know whether he really meant this, or said it to flatter me, suspecting it was my work. I had the reputation for being rich, and had stood treat for many a dinner, and it may be imagined he lost nothing by this compliment. One consequence was, that I immediately entered my name in his school, and paid him very liberally for some private lessons which he hinted I should take.

It was the flattery of this man and of my fellow-pupils, who were ever ready to say a good word for my work or borrow a crown, that induced me to think of winning my fortune as a sculptor at the death of my father. For law or physic I had now no partiality, nor had I the time and money to bestow upon

necessary studies ; moreover, art already fascinated me, and I doubtless overrated my powers by the eulogies bestowed upon my productions ; therefore, it seemed to me that no occupation in the world was more suited to my tastes and faculties than this of sculpture. I determined, however, to be guided by the advice of my master, so I went to him and frankly told him my position, asking him, at the same time, to tell me with equal candour if he thought I should do better to turn my energies to some other object. Having asked how much money I had to go on with, he assured me that I could do no better than to lay it out in perfecting my hand in his art. ‘And I warrant,’ says he, ‘that before the year is out you will produce something which shall make your name mentioned amongst the *dilettanti* ; and that achieved, your fortune is made.’

With this encouragement I took a garret, and applied myself to modelling with indefatigable ardour. My master praised all I did; and, not to let my enthusiasm cool, bade me lay aside the clay and try my hand at the chisel. This proposal I accepted eagerly, and for the next six months I spent a great deal of money in good marble, and a great deal of time in spoiling it. There was scarcely room to turn in my garret for the busts and figures I had made, and kept there; for though everyone who saw my work expressed great admiration of it, and was willing enough to accept a piece as a gift, I found none who offered to buy a single thing. However, my master, every time I paid him for his instruction, or lent him the money for a bottle of wine, declared I was making vast progress, and that the time was not far distant when I should be able to name my own price for anything I

chose to sell—which was undoubtedly true if the customers had only come forward to ask the question. At the end of the year my funds were so diminished that I began to doubt the truth of all my master had said, especially as I perceived that his praises ranged according to my liberality. He had three degrees of praise—positive, ‘Fair,’ for pence; comparative, ‘Very good!’ for silver; and superlative, ‘Most excellent!’ for gold.

One morning, as I was on my way to the studio, an elderly man, whom I passed every morning at the same place—for he was as punctual as I was in his movements—stopped, and, after bidding me ‘Good-morning!’ very civilly, said he had perceived by my white frock that I was a sculptor, and being struck by my personal appearance and regular habits, had ventured to make inquiries concerning me; he added that he should be very glad to give me a little advice

if I would not feel offended by his presumption. I assured him that I should take nothing ill which was intended for my benefit; whereupon he told me that I was wasting time and money in the studio of Brugiotti, and that I should do better to have no master at all than such an one as he, who, regarding only his own interest, would retard my progress while there was any money to be got out of me.

‘However,’ says he, ‘do you show me a specimen of your work; and if you have ability, I will employ you in my yard, where you will learn more in a week than Brugiotti could teach you in a year.’

I thanked Signor Sani—for that he gave me to understand was his name—and took him at once to my garret, where I showed him my work. He looked at the marbles with much gravity for some time; then glancing round the room, he asked where were my models.

‘Models,’ said I ; ‘I have none. Brugiotti insists upon cultivating the imagination.’

At this Sani laughed.

‘But surely,’ says he, ‘you worked out your idea first in clay.’

I told him I did nothing of the kind, but worked out my idea directly upon the marble.

‘Then no wonder,’ says he, ‘your work is so hard. You have attempted to do what Buonarotti himself could not have done. Don’t you know that all sculptors first execute their designs in clay, and then point them on the marble before touching the block?’

‘Pray, sir, what is this pointing?’ I asked, with all the simplicity imaginable.

Sani seemed astounded at the question, which indeed seems to me now an astonishing piece of ignorance ; but it is natural, for I had never been in any studio but that

of Brugiotti, where I alone worked in marble.

‘I perceive,’ says Signor Sani, ‘you know not even the rudiments of your art ; but the work you have shown me proves that you have an indefatigable devotion to it, and therefore I will take you into my yard if you will observe obedience to my directions and pay me a trifle down.’

I gratefully accepted the proposal, and, my little fortune being now reduced to four hundred crowns, I offered Sani half, which he clapped in his pocket without much ado, and reserved the rest for my board and lodging, determining to live even more frugally than before ; and we then went together to the work-yard, where I saw at a glance more than I had ever yet dreamed of. I found that Sani did a large export business in antique marbles, or rather in imitation antiques, which were copied so

closely from the original, even to the fractures and stains, that it was difficult to detect the difference. It was a very lucrative, if not a very honourable business, and it astonished me to learn how many of these counterfeit antiquities were sold to English dealers, and to think that a nation so remarkable for sound sense could spend such vast sums of money on what was in most cases worthless; for, of course, the most beautiful and well-known statues were seldom multiplied in this manner, but generally some fragment, so mutilated and disfigured that scarcely a trace of the original outline remained, was copied, and of these many hundreds were turned out by Sani in the course of a year. Nevertheless, as I recollect, he received an order for four Apollo Belvideres while I was with him.

There was a gallery filled with models, chiefly copies in plaster of fragments and

famous statues ; and in another gallery a score of artists worked at the marble, copying their models by pointing, which delicate and interesting process I then saw for the first time. But it was not here that I was set to work. Sani told me I must begin at the very beginning, and he set me to work in the yard squaring a block of marble which had just come in rough-hewn from the quarry.

I was kept in the yard for six weeks at this rough and simple employment, and then I was promoted to the casting-room, where I learnt to cast and make piece-moulds in plaster. And here I stayed for six months, during which time I certainly did work which Sani would have paid another man a good two crowns a week to perform ; but he never gave me a penny-piece, for he was fully as avaricious as Brugiotti, and only more honest because it

would not have been to his advantage to be otherwise. But I in nowise begrudged giving my time and labour, for it was an apprenticeship from which I learnt a great deal that was of service to me. I made the acquaintance of several good artists, who advised me to give all my spare time to modelling in clay and copying nature truthfully ; and, with this principle in my mind, I devoted more time to the faithful production of a single feature than before I had given to an entire figure.

From the casting-room I went to the modellers' gallery, where I kneaded clay for the artists, kept the models moist with damp cloths, and occasionally was permitted to 'rough out' a model for the sculptor to work upon.

I had been with Sani fifteen months, when, my store of pieces coming to an end, it became necessary that I should be

paid for my labour in order to subsist. I put my case to Sani, who, after much demurring, agreed to give me two crowns a week; and, taking me from the modelling-room, where the work I did in a day a woman or a boy could do for a few pence, he placed me in the sculptors' gallery, where I once more took up the chisel. As it was now to Sani's advantage that I should do the higher kind of work, he himself taught me the art of pointing, and set me to work upon the marble. I made rapid progress, and, after being in this department best part of two years, I completed, without assistance or guidance, a copy of the Venus di Milo, which Sani declared needed only staining to be sent into England and sold for the original. This was the last piece of work I did there, for when I came to reflect, after the first flush of triumph was passed, I perceived that my occupation, though not

culpable in the eye of the law, was nevertheless as disgraceful to a man of proper feeling as if he were engaged in casting false money. It was a species of forgery, and, as it seemed to me, all the worse for being perpetrated in the name of Art. I therefore gave Sani notice that I should leave him, and, though he offered to give me four times as much as I had been receiving if I would stay with him, I was firm in my resolve, and at the end of the week bade him and my fellow-workmen farewell.

I have dwelt long and perhaps tediously upon this part of my history, because of the important effect these years had upon my life. I owe to them the formation of my character. From a frivolous, careless idler I had grown to be an earnest, thoughtful workman, with a certain power of patient perseverance which astonishes me now when

I recollect how impetuous and variable my temper was formerly. My love of art had grown steadily and become inseparable from my life, so that it seemed to me I could only relinquish the one with the other. I had learnt to distinguish between real and false art, and in addition I had obtained a sound and practical knowledge of the mechanic part of the sculptor's business, and could use a chisel with as great a nicety as any man in Sani's factory ; so that though I may never be a great sculptor, I can at least say without flattery that I am a good mason.

And I have reason to thank Providence that I was a good mason.





CHAPTER II.

OF FALKLAND'S ILL AND GOOD FORTUNE.

IT will be imagined that I had not laid by much money during my stay with Signor Sani. Nevertheless, a couple of crowns a week had been more than sufficient for my requirements ; for a workman can live cheaply in Florence, where chestnuts and macaroni form the staple articles of diet, and garrets upon the outskirts of the town are to be had for next to nothing. In counting up my savings I found I had, all told, the equivalent of fifty shillings and threepence ; and this I reckoned would be

sufficient to maintain me while I was finding new employment. But employment, I discovered, was difficult to get; for, besides that Italian artists preferred workmen of their own nationality, one and all objected to having anything to do with a man who had worked for Sani. To use a vulgar expression, his name stank in Florence, and he imparted an evil odour to all about him. Day after day I spent in fruitless efforts to get work; and then, when all my money was gone, I did that which I had long hesitated to do: I wrote to my uncle—Lord Kestral—for the loan of a sum of money to carry me to England. I had learnt, as far back as '91, that his lordship was no longer a bachelor, nor a needy man, having married the widow of a millionaire; and I thought that now was the time to remind him of those promises he had made so profusely when I was a lad and required nothing.

I had not heard from my uncle since my

dear father's death, when he wrote to express his great sorrow, and to inquire if any legacy was his by his brother's will; nor had I written to him once in the six years that had passed since that melancholy occasion, so that I felt reluctant to beg a favour of one whom I had so neglected. However, he was my nearest relative, and as he could well afford to help me, I did not doubt of his ready response to my request. I waited three months in expectation, and then, no reply coming, I concluded that either he must be dead, or that, having laid my letter aside, he had forgotten all about it, for I knew his memory to be exceedingly treacherous; though from what I now know of his character, I believe that his silence was due to my own indiscretion in stating the purpose to which I intended to employ his loan. He might have sent me a few guineas to remain in Florence, but had not the heart to put me

in the way of making further calls upon his generosity.

As I had endured the greatest privations in the last few weeks, and my position allowed of no further delay, I went to the municipal authorities and laid my case before them. When the truth of my story was ascertained, I was sent on to Genoa, where the British Consul had me put aboard a merchant vessel which was then on the point of starting under convoy for England. After an eventless voyage I was set ashore at Dover; and there, on the very morning of my arrival—which was, strangely enough, ten years to a day from the date of my leaving it with my father—I had the good fortune to get employment in a mason's yard. The hardships I had endured latterly would have reconciled me to this lowly occupation had my pride revolted against it; but, indeed, I was never ashamed of

being seen in my smock or employed in rough work, and was rather inclined to let my vanity err on the other side by overrating the value of a workman and his claim to admiration.

However, it was not as a mason that I wished to pass my life. I longed to be again in a sculptor's workshop, and to make the shapeless stone take beautiful form ; and so, as soon as I had saved a few shillings, I quitted Dover and set out on foot for London, where I hoped to find an artist more ready to engage me than those of Florence had been. As I tramped along the road and came in sight of the weald of Kent—which was now in its loveliest aspect, for the month was May—I could not but think of my home with a sentiment of regret, and a longing to see again the old house with its terrace and wide-spreading, smooth lawn ; and this feeling gained such ascendancy

when I came to a rise whence I could see the village of Maplehurst, and fancied I saw the red-brick chimneys of Falkland House rising above the thicket of larches beyond, that I resolved to turn out of my path, though it cost me a couple of leagues, in order to gratify my desire. And so I came to my old home.

The gates of the long drive were open, and it was with the strangest emotion I looked down the path which I had so often trod, but now had no right to set my foot upon, and then passed down the lane which skirted the grounds. I ascended a bank by the side of the lane, and looked over into the garden. Nothing was altered. There stretched away the paddock, with the avenue of larches on one side, the pond on the other; the yew hedge that separated it from the lawn, where the short turf was sprinkled with daisies, the steps

leading from the lawn to the terrace ; the embrasure in the wall at the end of the terrace, where my father and I used to sit and watch the sun setting over the weald—I seemed to know every stone in the wall, and remarked one that was loose, and had been loose in the old days ; and the house itself, with its red-brick façade and flamboyant gables, and the tall twisted chimneys, and the many windows with their diamond panes, and the odd projections and recesses which gave it such a quaint beauty—all was unchanged—all save the people who lived in it. A gentleman in a handsome dress was standing on the terrace, and beside him was a man with a rule in his hand ; they were talking together, and looking up at the north end of the house as if they contemplated making some alteration. And whether it was the notion of the old house being altered, or a feeling of solitude and aliena-

tion, or merely the memory of past happiness, I know not; but something at that moment so wrung my heart that, as I stepped down into the road again and walked away, the tears dropped down from my eyes.

I stopped at the inn in the village to refresh myself, and as I was drinking my ale in the tap-room two men entered the house talking :

‘ Gi’ un a smack wi’ ’s hammer and smashed the nose off’s face,’ says one ; ‘ an’ what’s to be done wi’ ’un now’s more’n I can tell you.’

The speaker rapped on the bar with a piece of money, and his companion, after a moment’s silence, said in a small piping voice :

‘ Can’t ’e stick’s noase on again ?’

‘ No. ’Tis smashed all to nought, I tell ye.’

‘ Can’t ’e put a new un on ?’

‘ Why, so we’ve been a-tryin’ and a-tryin’ to do. My man Jo’s as handy a man as

any in the county of Kent, and he made sure's if he cut a hole in's face he could stick a new un in ; so what's 'e do but sit up all night gettin' new nose ready, and 's good a nose it was as you'd wish to see ; so come'n this mornun, we cuts a hole in's face, and sticks the nose in. But, bless you'er heart, that only made un wus 'an ever ; for why, his face looks one way and's nose pints t'other.'

' Good Lord, master !' exclaimed the landlady, who had come to the bar, and was listening with terror to this history, 'sure some awful accident's happened !'

'To be sure there has. Draw us a pot of ale, mistress,' replied the man ; and then, addressing his companion, he continued : ' And to make the matter wus, his cheeks is brown and's nose's white, and paint makes un no better.'

' 'Tis a drefle bad job, to be sure,' says

the man with the little shrill voice, 'for the Cap'n do set a mighty store by the image.'

'Tis an image you are speaking of,' cries the landlady, in a tone of relief. 'Heaven be praised 'tis no worse!'

'I wish't had been anything else.'

'Tis the image of Sir Anthony Clifford in the church,' the piping voice explained. 'Mr. Chives's men are repairing the stone in front of the tomb, and Mr. Chives's son Tom, who was gaming about with a hammer——'

'Boy-like,' interposed the landlady.

'Boy-like or not, I'll gi' un a dressing fit for a man when I catch un,' says the father. 'The young hound's hid himself; but he'll get a surer hiding than that when I find un. 'Tis as good as thirty pound a year out of my pocket, for the Cap'n gave me all the repairs on his estate; and now 'tis all to nothing he'll never let me see

the colour of his money again when he finds what's happened to the family stone.'

'Can't you send up to Lunnon for some of these artist chaps to come down?'

'Much good that'll do me! They'll never touch a job before they've taken three weeks to think about it; and then they'd make such a crowing and to do over it, that there'd be no keepin' it from the Cap'n's ears, even if so be he don't come down to his seat afore the job's done. Plague take me if I know what to do!'

At this I rose from my seat, and going to the bar where the two men stood, I addressed myself to the larger, who I concluded must be he who was placed in such a quandary by the playfulness of his son, and told him I was a sculptor just arrived from Italy, and that I would undertake to restore the broken figure, if upon examination I found it within my power to do so.

Mr. Chives looked me full in the face, and seeing that I was a likely looking man for the job, he proposed that we should go together and look at the work at once.

I knew the tomb of Sir Anthony Clifford well. It was a work of the Elizabethan period in high relief, and represented the knight with his five sons kneeling in an attitude of prayer on one side, facing his wife, who knelt with her six daughters behind her on the other ; and I could not help smiling at the effort of the 'handy man,' Joe, to repair the damaged face of Sir Anthony—for the nose, which he had sat up all night to make, had been stuck in as if the figure were presented at full face instead of in profile, so that, as Mr. Chives had said, the face looked one way and the nose stood at right angles with it, and the effect was very ludicrous. It was not a difficult job, although the lines of the face

and upper lip had been cut away to make room for the new feature, and I promised to restore the face as nearly as possible to the original lines, and to stain the marble in harmony, so that the restoration would be noticeable only on very close inspection, if he would provide me with tools and materials.

‘Well,’ says he, after a little deliberation, ‘you shall have a try at un, for you can’t make un much wus ’an he is ; and if you succeed, I’ll give—let me see, now’—he scanned my clothes as if to judge how little he might pay — ‘I’ll give you half-a-guinea.’

‘If I succeed,’ said I, ‘you must pay me five guineas ; if I fail, I agree to take out my work and charge you nothing.’

He expressed great astonishment at my demand, and tried to bring me to some abatement ; but as I firmly declined to do

it for less, and he knew full well it would cost him double to have a sculptor from London, he at length agreed, and, taking a list of the things I required, which he promised to furnish that evening—for his shop was at Maidstone, which is seven miles from Maplehurst—he got into his cart and drove off, with his handy-man lying in the straw at his feet ; for poor Joe, since his failure as an artist, had been drowning mortification in old ale, and was now completely drunk.

I was eager to begin. The work required a certain amount of artistic skill and judgment, and was for that reason agreeable to me. I would have done it for the mere pleasure it would yield me—indeed, I would have done it to get Chives out of his difficulty, or to save his unlucky son a thrashing ; certainly, I should not have asked him more than he offered me, had he not thought me too poor to refuse half-a-guinea and at-

tempted to profit by my misfortune. No sooner was he gone than I borrowed a shovel, and, going down into the valley, I dug out a spit of clean clay ; then, having returned the spade to the landlady of the inn, I carried my clay to the church. In my absence the door had been locked by the sexton's wife, who, while I was seeking another entrance, came up to me with the keys in her hand. She was a stout, motherly woman, neatly dressed, and with a spotless cap. Her name was Mrs. Blight, and she had a ludicrous sense of her own importance as the wife of a man who was both sexton and clerk of the parish. I remembered her well, but the last ten years and my late troubles had so altered my appearance, that she failed to recognise me.

‘ You’re one of Mr. Chives’s young men, I suppose ? ’ said she. ‘ Do you want to go into the church ? ’

‘I do—and I’ll thank you to open the door at once,’ said I, ‘for this clay is not light.’

‘You’re not going to do anything at Captain Clifford’s monument to-day, I hope,’ said she, when the door was open.

‘Indeed, but I am.’

‘Well, I don’t know as it’ll be convenient for you to be chipping about there, for there’s a young lady a-coming a picter-painting close by.’

‘To be sure,’ said I, throwing down the clay, ‘’twill be inconvenient; but I must try and put up with it.’

‘I’ll have you to know that I don’t think it becoming in a person of your position to make jokes, young man; and, as my husband is sextant of this church, you’d better behave yourself.’

‘That I will,’ said I, ‘for I’ve a prodigious respect for the clergy. And now,

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'That I will,' said I, 'for I've a prodigious respect for the clergy. And now,

mother, I must go out for a few minutes ; and, if the young lady comes in my absence, I beg you to see that she doesn't meddle with this clay.'

I left the good woman exclaiming against my 'imperance,' as she called it, and once more returned to the inn, where I had left the bundle containing my smock, and where Joe had left his tools. While I changed my coat for the smock, the landlady drew a quart of ale in a stone bottle and cut a good portion of bread and cheese, which she wrapped in a clean napkin for me to take with me ; for I was resolved not to leave my work until the light faded. This provision I carried with Joe's tools to the church, where I found myself alone ; for Mrs. Blight had gone, and the expected visitor had not yet arrived. I set to work at once. The first thing was to take out the nose with which Joe had adorned Sir

Anthony, but here I encountered some difficulty; for the thorough-going workman had embedded the feature in strong glue, which had been speedily hardened by the marble, and it was only to be got out with the chisel. I was still at work with my hammer when Mrs. Blight brushed past me, carrying a colour-box and a stool in her hands.

‘That’s right, mother,’ said I, pausing to blow the dust from my work. ‘Brought the young lady’s playthings to keep her out of mischief?’

‘Mother indeed!’ cried the good woman. ‘I should be very sorry to be *your* mother, young man!’ and she set down the stool with a crash.

I turned round, as if in expectation of finding that she had smashed a leg off the seat in her indignation, and discovered that the young lady herself was standing close by, looking at me.



CHAPTER III.

HOW GEORGE FALKLAND DISPLEASED THE
YOUNG LADY, NOT VERY SERIOUSLY, AND
WHO SHE WAS.

I REMOVED my hat and made the young lady a bow. She received my silent apology with a show of supercilious indifference. She was drawing off her gloves, and she stood looking at me without moving a muscle of her face until, laying aside my hat, I returned to my business.

Had she been a timid young girl, I should have been sorry for the words I had let fall,

fearing that they might discourage her, or put her out of heart with her amusement ; but there was so much composure and self-esteem in this young lady's face, that I saw no reason to be concerned for the effect I had made on her mind. In my linen smock, and with my face all powdered with the fine dust I had been blowing from the white marble, I dare say I looked neither better nor worse than any other mason's man ; and the opinions or reflections of people of that class are very contemptible to most young ladies of wealth and position.

‘Would you like me to walk up and down, miss?’ asked Mrs. Blight. I stayed my hammer an instant to catch the response.

‘Oh dear no!’ said the young lady in a very pretty voice, and with an accent which seemed to ridicule the notion of her requiring protection.

A very contemptuous, unpleasant young

person, thought I, as I fell to chipping away the marble.

‘Mother indeed!’ exclaimed Mrs. Blight again, as she brushed past me on her way out, and she cast a glance of the most profound contempt at me.

I went on with my work, never giving another thought to the young or the old lady until the cutting was finished, and the socket ready to receive the clay. The boards on which I stood were covered with chips, and raised too high for my convenience; they must be moved. There was an accumulation of chips and dust upon the monument also which must be brushed off. I was just about to begin these operations when I thought of the young lady’s wet colours. I turned about. She was taking some colour from her palette with a little frown upon her brow, as if she were irritated by failure. Perhaps the continual ‘clip,

clink, clip ' of my chisel had distracted her thoughts, despite her self-command, and she was painting from a sheer determination not to be thwarted in her purpose by a mere mason.

' I must trouble you to cover your paints and canvas for a time,' I said. ' For I am about to move these boards, and the dust will fly.'

' Oh, this is very provoking !' cries miss, with a little stamp of the foot. ' Cannot you shake your boards when I am gone ?'

' Certainly,' said I, amused by this display of petulance, ' if you will be good enough to go at once.'

' But I cannot go now, and I will not,' says she, looking at me with her brows contracted over her eyes, which, despite their expression of anger, were, I saw, particularly handsome. ' I have come here on purpose to paint.'

' And I am here on purpose to repair this

monument. If we cannot work together, it becomes a question of who can best afford to desist for a week or so—you who paint, as I presume, for amusement, or I who cut stone for my living.'

'You are very rude,' says the lady, rising from her seat.

'No, I am not—at least, not intentionally. Come, we are both losing time to no purpose but to increase your discomfort. I shall be glad to lessen your inconvenience if it is possible. I will remove all your paraphernalia to a place of safety, while you take a turn in the avenue without. One cannot walk there on a sweet spring day like this without a feeling of peace and goodwill towards all men—masons included. When you hear the ring of my chisel again, you may consider yourself free from further annoyance for the rest of the day.'

'I can remove my *paraphernalia* myself,'

said she, with a little less asperity in her tone, though it was clear she disliked the term I had applied to her paints and picture.

‘ You had better do as I bid you,’ said I, stepping up to her easel. I glanced at her picture, and was at once struck by the excellent painting of a column on which were given the colours from a stained window with such fidelity that I had to move the picture to be sure that it was not the light itself rather than the pigment I looked at. I had seen many young ladies who affected art in Florence, where one seldom sees an Englishwoman without a portfolio and a box of colours ; but as yet I had seen none whose work was not execrable. I had classed this young lady with these feeble *dilettanti*, and found I had done her a great injustice.

‘ Does it not strike you that you are acting with unwarrantable freedom ?’ asked

the young lady, who by her manner seemed undecided whether to be amused by the liberty I was taking or to resent it.

‘It did not occur to me to give the matter a thought before ; but,’ said I, ‘now I look at your work I see no reason why I should not speak to you with perfect freedom. You are an artist.’

I looked up at her as I spoke, and perceived that my words caused a flush of pleasure to come into her pretty face ; her eyes looked ten times handsomer in their present animation, and her lips, which were most delicately formed, took the sweetest curve, just showing a glimpse of her shining teeth. She could not have been more than eighteen years old, though previously, when her countenance was set in an expression of disdain, I had taken her to be more than twenty. It would have puzzled an indifferent person—

Mrs. Blight, for example—to explain why the simple remark of an artisan, engaged in dusty work and habited in the roughest manner, should make so great an effect upon the mind of a wealthy and proud young lady ; but remembering how elated I had felt in receiving the encouragement of Brugiotti, whom I knew to be a venal and interested rascal, I recognised in her emotion the feelings of an artist doubtful of her own ability and eager to rise above the rank of a mere dabbler in art.

She was silent, and I felt sure she expected me to say something more in praise of her work ; but I considered I had said as much as I had a right to say. Besides which, I knew the value of praise too well to abuse it. She suffered me to help her remove her materials, and moved with that lightness and elasticity which denotes cheerfulness ; indeed, it was evident

that she was better pleased with me than she had been at first, for when all was finished she said 'Thank you,' very graciously.

'Tis not such a terrible job after all—is it?' I asked, laughing; and then, remarking the elegance of her dress, I added, 'And now, go away; the dust will spoil your pretty dress.'

She obeyed, but with a little gesture of displeasure, as if she were not used to take commands from anyone; or as if, after being told she was an artist, it irritated her to be treated as a merely pretty and well-dressed young lady.

I quickly moved my scaffolding and dusted the monument; then, having replaced her easel—the position of which I had been careful to mark with a piece of chalk on the floor—and put her appliances in their original position, I took a few turns

with the hammer and chisel to apprise her that I had finished 'shaking my boards,' after which, settling down to my own business, I suffered the young lady to go clean out of my thoughts.

First, I kneaded a piece of clay sufficient for my purpose, beating it thoroughly and removing the grit to make it work well; and then, having well wetted the face of Sir Anthony and the socket, I squeezed the clay into the hole, and moulded it with my fingers into the feature that seemed to me, from a study of his sons' noses (which were all alike) to be such as had been originally there. This engrossed my thoughts entirely, nor should I once have thought of the young lady had I not been reminded of her presence by hearing a little cough. But I did not quit my work for a moment until I had roughly finished my operation, and was prepared to continue it with the little bone tool

I had brought with me from Florence. I dare say the lady took this inattention to her as another proof of my rudeness and the incivility of common workmen, an appearance which must have been heightened by my occasionally humming a tune, which is a habit with me whenever I find my work going well and smoothly.

The church clock striking two just as I came to this point in my work, I remembered that I had not yet eaten my dinner ; and, as I had taken no food since eight in the morning, certain sensations of hunger gave the recollection additional significance, and I resolved to satisfy the calls of Nature before going further in the pursuit of Art. As I turned to pick up the bundle containing my bread and cheese, I glanced at the young lady. Her attention was firmly fixed upon her work. I laid out my dinner on the napkin, and, sitting down upon the

scaffolding, I ate and regarded the pretty artist at the same time, thereby gratifying my taste for beauty as well as for bread and cheese. I think, from her manner of painting, which was obviously without order or precision, that she knew I had left off work and was regarding her. My silence may have led her to suppose that I was behind her, criticizing her performance. This seemed to me the more likely, because I saw the colour mount to her cheek, and presently she turned and looked over her shoulder, and then cast her eyes rapidly towards me, who at that moment was taking a bite out of the thick slice of bread. She instantly returned to her painting, and kept her attention fixed upon it for some time; when next I found her eyes upon me I was just setting down my stone bottle after taking a good draught from it. She turned away, as it seemed to my eyes, with

a little shiver of disgust. Her lips may have never touched anything grosser than crystal or porcelain.

The more I looked at her profile, the more it enchanted me—the outline was so delicate and fine, and every curve so exquisitely graceful. And then in the expression of her face there was, when she forgot my presence, that look which recalled to my mind Milton's picture of Penseroso, with the rapt soul sitting in her eyes. I took another drink from my bottle, and then, pulling out my little old note-book and a pencil, I proceeded to sketch the outline, thinking that it might be useful to me one day when I had time to do a little modelling. Now and then I laid down my book to take up the hunch of bread and cheese and get a mouthful. Once, as I was setting down my dinner and shifting back the pencil to my right hand, I found her regarding me. As

she resumed her position, I said, 'Thank you;' but my mouth was full, and I had better have said nothing. I was thus-wise employed sketching and eating, when Mrs. Blight came up the aisle, and did me the honour to look at what I was doing. Casting her eyes from the sketch to the young lady, she exclaimed :

'Well, upon my word, I call that impudence!'

'Do you?' said I. 'Now I call it devotion. I don't see any trace of impudence in the face of a beautiful girl who is studying beautiful things. However, as you call it impudence, mother, I suppose it must be so.'

'I beg you won't call me mother!' cried the good woman, in a rage; and then she went to the young lady, and, having informed her that a coach had been sent for her, she hoped that Mr. Chives's 'labourer' had not been annoying of her. At the

word 'labourer,' which she uttered with great emphasis, I ventured to groan, as if I were sorely wounded by the epithet. The young lady did not smile. She was, as I think now, annoyed that I should joke with such a person as Mrs. Blight. Holding my sketch at a little distance, I perceived that the contour of the chin was faulty, and, looking from it to the artist, I found that she had risen from her seat.

'May I ask you to sit again for a moment?' I said.

'So?' she asked, after sitting down with a smile at the end of a moment's hesitation.

'Yes, so. . . . That will do. . . . Thank you.'

'Well, of *all* the abomorable imperances!' exclaimed Mrs. Blight.

The young lady, having put on her hat and drawn on her gloves, turned to me and

inclined her head. I rose and made her the best bow I could, and she went away. It seemed as if the light had faded when she was gone, and I could not get her out of my mind until I again began work.

I had finished modelling Sir Anthony's nose to my satisfaction, and was covering my work with my damped handkerchief, when Mr. Chives came into the church.

'I've brought you your articles, young fellow,' says he, coming towards me. 'Hulloa! what have you been doing?'

I took off the handkerchief.

'Ad's my life!' cries he, 'if 'tain't the very thing, blame me!'

He expressed his delight with many other ejaculations, and finally offered to give me regular employment in his shop if I would be 'a bit reasonable;' but as I had higher hopes than to be his servant, I civilly declined his offer. I left him sounding my

praises to Mrs. Blight, and took a walk towards Leeds, through the lanes, which were at their very sweetest; for the may was opening, and the air was fragrant with its nutty odour, and the thrushes and black-birds were whistling and singing in every thicket. But I own it was not alone the flowers and birds that filled my spirit with tender fancies. There dwelt in my mind the image of the beautiful young girl I had seen in the church, and so vividly did she stand out in my memory, as I inhaled the fragrant air, and caught with my ear the rich notes of the mated birds, that I do think I shall never hearken to the carolling of the thrush and smell the scent of may without a feeling of gentleness and longing love.

I own that as I passed the gates of a gentleman's garden that lay in my way, I peered through it to the right and left, with a vague hope that I might catch sight of

her—it was foolish indeed. She was still in my thoughts when I reached the inn, whither I returned while it was yet light—for the rain obliged me to curtail my walk ; and then, finding no book to read, and having no relish for the society in the tap-room, I bethought me of amusing myself with modelling until it was time to go to bed. I repaired to the church once more, and having furnished myself with an old tile and a lump of clay, I returned to the inn and obtained a candle, and went up to the room where I was to sleep. There I spread a piece of paper over the table, and having covered my tile an inch thick with clay, I sat down with my little old book at my side, and proceeded to model the face of the young lady in low relief. I worked at it until my candle was burnt to the end, when I was forced, with regret, to give over ; for the longer I studied the face,

the more I found in it to admire, and the more delight I found in portraying its beauties. I could not get to sleep for thinking of my medallion ; nor did I cease to think upon it until a cock in a stable hard by fell a-crowing, when somehow my thoughts took another turn, and I fell asleep. It was still early when I awoke ; the long shadows told me that the sun had risen but little over the horizon. Nevertheless, I dressed with all despatch, and sitting down by the table, uncovered my work—which I could not regard without satisfaction. I worked at it till it was finished ; and then, to test the value of my own judgment, I carried it downstairs, and setting it before the landlady, I said : ‘Pray, madam, will you tell me if you ever remember to have seen a face like that ?’

‘Lord, ah, that have I !’ cried she, after

looking at it for a minute. 'To be sure, I know the look of that pretty face as well as my own; though I've seen my own a many times oftener than t'other. Dear heart! 'tis the very spit of her.'

'She lives in this neighbourhood?' I asked, prompted by a feeling of curiosity which I cannot attempt to account for.

'Surely she does. 'Tis Miss Adams, the young lady from Adams's Hall—as they call it now.'

'Adams's Hall?' I said, trying to recollect any house of that name.

'The red house about a mile up the road, as used to belong to Squire Falkland before he went away to furrin' parts. 'Tis quite lately let to this family.'

Now here was a discovery. The young lady was living in the very house in which I was born. I said nothing of this matter to the landlady, but taking the medallion,

which, as I pointed out to her, was wet and likely to get damaged, I carried it up to my room and set it in a safe place, with my handkerchief, moderately damp, laid over it, that it might be fit for casting when I had leisure.





CHAPTER IV.

FALKLAND BIDS MISS ADAMS GOOD-BYE.—HIS
HONESTY IS COMMENDED BY MRS. BLIGHT.

IT was late when I began work upon Sir Anthony Clifford's monument ; however, by eleven o'clock I had covered the face, including the clay portion which I had modelled the day before, with a thick coat of plaster. This was to serve as a matrix for the cast, which in turn was to serve as my model in cutting the marble. While the plaster was hardening, I strolled to the other side of the church to examine a

marble, and was standing there when I heard voices outside, and Miss Adams entered the building. She passed down the aisle, and coming to the monument, she turned to Mrs. Blight and said, in a tone of satisfaction, which I know now was only assumed :

‘The mason has finished his work and gone, I see.’

‘No, that he isn’t, miss—worse luck,’ replied Mrs. Blight. ‘He was here not five minutes ago, and as sarcy as ever.’

I watched Miss Adams for some time without being seen, while Mrs. Blight arranged her easel and stool, complaining the while of me, and the airs which these workmen gave themselves. Miss Adams listened as she removed her bonnet and drew off her gloves. I found the lines of her figure as graceful and full of young beauty as her face, and should have stood there watching her move-

ments still longer, had she not thrown her glance across the church as she arranged her kerchief. I crossed the church and made her a bow, to which she replied by a slight bend ; then I passed her and went to see how my plaster was drying.

‘Ah !’ exclaimed Mrs. Blight, whose spirit was still warlike. ‘*Some* people can hold their tongues when other people are present.’

‘’Tis a pity all people can’t—isn’t it, *madre* ?’ said I.

‘My name’s not Marjery, sir. I was christened Martha, and I won’t be called out of my name by no one.’

‘Then Martha I will call you henceforth,’ said I.

The plaster was set. I carefully eased the mould off, and then with my tool removed the now useless clay from the fractured face of the monument. Mrs. Blight

left the church ; Miss Adams opened her colour-box, and began to dress her palette.

‘ You have no boards to shake this morning ? ’ said she inquiringly.

‘ I was careful to do that before you came,’ I replied. ‘ You see, I am not rude this morning. I should be very sorry to spoil your work.’

‘ Do you think my amusement deserves so much consideration ? ’ she asked, in a somewhat sarcastic tone.

‘ I would not willingly spoil your amusement ; but I spoke of your work.’

‘ And that—— ? ’ she asked, trying to look unconcerned.

‘ You want me to tell you what I think of it,’ said I, approaching her.

‘ Oh, I know all that I did yesterday was bad.’

‘ My presence distracted you.’

‘ Yes, I think it did. But the rest of the work ? ’

She stood aside that I might look at it. I wondered what had been passing in her mind to make her this morning so much more gracious than she had been yesterday. I looked at the picture carefully, and with the same astonishment that I had felt in looking at it previously. It was a mixture of good and bad.

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘I saw the best part of this yesterday.’

‘Can you suggest any improvements?’

‘No. I think it is impossible to improve this work.’

She misunderstood my meaning, for she said cheerfully, and yet with some hesitation:

‘Then you think it is—is—is all right?’

‘No, indeed; that I do not.’

This unexpected announcement stung Miss Adams’s pride at once.

‘Perhaps you may be able to point out the defects,’ said she, again with a touch of sarcasm in her tone.

‘Yes, I can,’ said I. ‘The colouring is not all right, and the drawing is wrong, and there is no idea at all in the picture.’

This wholesale condemnation seemed to take away her breath for a moment.

‘To begin with,’ said she presently, ‘where is the drawing faulty.’

‘Here, and here,’ said I, pointing with my clayey tool to several parts where the perspective was at fault. ‘I should say that you had changed your point of view ; and that you painted this part of the thing three or four yards from that.’

‘That nasty pillar came in the way,’ said the girl, pouting.

‘It doesn’t look as if it were in the habit of moving about,’ said I, with a laugh. ‘I never saw a column come in anyone’s way

yet awhile. You mean that you began work in the wrong place.'

'I don't think ordinary people would perceive that,' she remonstrated.

'If you paint down to ordinary perceptions your work will always be faulty.'

The young lady drew a deep sigh. Then, after a moment's silence—

'And the colouring?' she asked.

'You painted these lights on a sunny morning, and those on a cloudy day.'

'I am not conscious of having done so, and I tried to make the colours match.'

'But they would not be matched. It is not like trimming a bonnet when you sit down in the sacred cause of Art to depict the effects of Nature.'

The girl hung her head in silence. Then there came a rebellious look into her face, as if she found my criticism unkind and harsh, and were determined to dispense with my

judgment since I could find no good in what she did, and could give her no encouragement to do better. I could see that she did not care to receive rebuke, and perhaps none but a man who knew the mischief of false and indiscriminating praise, and who thought more of her good than his own gratification, could have found it in his heart to make so sweet a face look sad when to fill it with smiles was so easy. I did not wish her to think that I had found fault from a morose feeling; that would have undone any good that criticism could do.

‘The errors here arise from want of thought, from youthfulness, maybe from your happiness even,’ said I.

‘My happiness!’ she exclaimed. ‘What has that to do with painting the aisle of a church?’

‘Much. Sorrow makes poets, and only poets can paint pictures—except such as

will satisfy the limited taste of "ordinary people." All these defects in drawing and colouring arise from your starting without a fixed idea. You walk into this aisle, and you say, "Oh, how pretty ! This will make a nice picture ;" and after a time you produce something which in one respect has not the merit of an architect's hard design—for that at least is true. Now, I'll tell you how it seems to me a poet and an artist would proceed. His heart, we will say, is filled with melancholy, and upon his imagination comes the vision of an aisle, grey and cold, and sad in tone, with perhaps a ray of light streaming through an open door, casting long shadows to tell of a dying day, and increase the pathos of the thing. And having conceived a grand picture, he makes this aisle his model, by which to work out his conception. But he fixes the point of view whence his idea may be realized, and he is

careful to choose a time when the light is in harmony with his subject. A column will not get in the way of this man, and he will be conscious whether the sky be clouded or not.'

There was not a gleam of hope in the poor child's face. She toyed with a brush in her hand awhile ; then she asked, with a little quaver in her voice, what she should do with the picture.

'Cut it up,' said I.

She kept her eyes down, and I saw a tear start from her eye.

'I might as well give it to Mrs. Blight,' said she.

'Worthy as the amiable Martha is, I could not advise you to be so generous. No, cut it up and keep it. There are a dozen pieces of excellent work here—most excellent. Keep them as studies. Only give Martha the coloured portion that you tried to

match. This column with the light from the stained window struck me with astonishment the first moment I looked on your work—'tis good indeed ; and the drawing here is quite admirable.'

I spoke with perfect candour, for as I pointed to the different bits I found them worthy of all or perhaps more than I said in their praise. Miss Adams answered not a word. Still looking at the picture, I said :

'I have discouraged you.'

'Oh no, no, no !' she cried. 'I am very grateful for your discriminating criticism.' Her face was radiant with delight when I looked at it, though the lashes of her eyes were yet wet. 'All your remarks are true, quite true.'

'Especially the favourable ones, hey ?' said I, with a laugh.

'No ; I think I like your censure as well as your praise, now. 'Tis that which makes

the praise of value. 'Twill please me to cut up the picture as you suggest.'

'And so your work here ends,' said I, with a feeling of regret to think I should lose the sight of her pretty face.

She stood listless for awhile, reflecting on what I had said probably; then she said :

'You think I am too happy to feel the poetry of sadness—you think I am—I am only a child?'

'You are a child, and happily not a precocious one. Your field of poetry lies outside these walls. The brighter side of nature you could depict, imparting to the picture all the joyful sunlight of a child's nature—at least so I think as I look at you; the sadder side you may leave to those who have suffered disappointment.'

I think she took my words to refer to my own past troubles, for her eyes filled at once with a tender sympathy, and she asked :

‘Must one experience disappointments to know what sadness is?’

I looked into her face as I had looked into her picture, to discern the inner meaning of its expression.

‘All good and beautiful natures are capable of sympathy with suffering; but the sentiment is transient. Only our own sorrows endure. Little as I have watched your face, I have seen in it the grave and gay thoughts chasing each other like the lights and shadows over the meadows on a day like this. Deeper feelings will come soon enough, ’tis but the spring-tide of your life at present. And now to my work.’

I left her, and went back to my plaster, with the strangest aching in my heart, for I could not account to myself for the pain I felt. True, the experience of the past six or seven years had been of continued struggles and thwarted hopes, and they had

taken away my gaiety and made me old before my time; yet had I nothing to regret in being a thoughtful and sober workman rather than a frivolous and careless trifier.

The plaster was dry enough, so I oiled it thoroughly, and then took out a couple of handfuls of plaster and put in my pan to mix. Whilst I was doing this, Miss Adams came to my side. I had purposely kept my eyes from her, I know not why; and now, as I raised my eyes, I found she had put on her bonnet and her gloves and was ready to go. She hesitated before speaking. I was afraid she was about to thank me for speaking my mind about her picture, or to say some commonplace civility about the possibility of seeing me again one of these days. But she did nothing of the kind. She looked me full in the face, and I saw in her large sweet truthful eyes a soul that was above conventional pretences.

‘Good-bye,’ she said, and no more.

She held out her gloved hand frankly. I took it in mine, which was all covered with plaster.

‘Good-bye!’ said I. ‘Good-bye, you beautiful child.’

I was seized with such a rapture at that moment that it is surprising I said or did nothing more foolish. Our hands parted, and she walked away with a dreamy astonishment in her face, as if a new life had suddenly been revealed to her senses. I watched her retreating figure till she passed through the door, and my eyes still rested where they had last seen her, until a light laugh beyond broke the spell. ‘She has forgotten me already,’ thought I.

It was less easy for me to forget. I felt towards this young girl as I have felt, though in a minor degree, towards an unfinished model which promised, with proper

treatment, to realize my highest ideal of beauty, with the same eager desire to mould and form her to my conception ; and the regret which I might have experienced had my model been destroyed by accident, and with it all my hopes of making a thing of perfect beauty, I felt as I realized that it was not for me to watch with growing delight the development of that young soul to a lovely maturity.

I went on with my work in a mechanical fashion, and scarcely noticed the sexton's wife when she came to fetch Miss Adams's undressed palette, her colours, and her easel, though I knew the good woman spoke to me. Later on Mrs. Blight came up the aisle again, curious, no doubt, to know why Miss Adams had left so suddenly.

'I suppose you've been making of a dust or something,' says she ; 'for though, to be sure, Miss Adams says you ain't misbehaved

yourself, I can't think but what you're to blame for her going away all of a suddint, and looking so down-hearted, when 'twas not an hour ago she arrived in such gay spirits. There was something or other on her mind, I know, for all her pretending to laugh; and if you've been the cause of her losing heart, you ought to be ashamed of yourself.'

I had no heart to skirmish with the woman, so she talked on without interruption until she was tired; and then, thank God! she left me to myself.

When I left off work to eat my dinner, I unwittingly strolled to the spot where Miss Adams had been painting, and upon the ground I discovered a paint-brush which Mrs. Blight must have let fall in removing the things. Had it been the greatest treasure in the world I could not have picked it up more eagerly or guarded it more carefully. I

reckoned that it would enable me to see the young lady again, and I resolved that when my day's work was finished I would carry it up to my old home, and give it to her. For a while this silly project kept me in a flutter, and I speculated on what might result from the visit with a puerile folly of which I was heartily ashamed when I came to reason coolly on the subject, and to consider what would be the probable outcome of yielding to my sentimental impulse. I began to see that it was not entirely an artistic feeling that made Miss Adams so interesting to me ; and when this fact was realized, it needed but little reasoning to convince me that it would be wrong to do anything which might, by the remotest chance, lead Miss Adams to participate in my extravagant passion.

I was so agitated and unsettled that I would not attempt to do anything beyond

the simply mechanical part of my work that day ; and when this was done, I left the church and crossed the road to the sexton's house, where I found Mrs. Blight under the porch, sitting with a lapful of her good-man's stockings which she was darning.

I gave her the brush, told her where I had found it, and begged she would take it to Miss Adams without delay.

'That I will,' says she, 'for I like to give every man his due, whatever be his faults. 'Tis honest of you to return it, and more so than I should have given you credit for ; and so be sure I will take it up to the young gentlewoman at once, that she may not think otherways of you ; for I love honesty as I love my bread, and I will confess I am heartily glad to find myself mistaken in your character, though Mr. Chives do nothing but say what a famous work-man you are. And to show you the same,

come along with me this minute.' She led the way through the house, and pausing at the door leading into her garden—'There,' says she, 'this door-step's that sank that the water comes in the house when it rains hard, and I've had it in my mind to let Mr. Chives see to it these six months; hows'ever, for your honesty, I'll give the job to you, providing you don't charge ex-orbirant, and sweep up your mess when you've done.'

It was a mason's job, and I saw no reason to refuse doing it; so I undertook to make the step good for a shilling, and sweep the place up tidily when it was done.

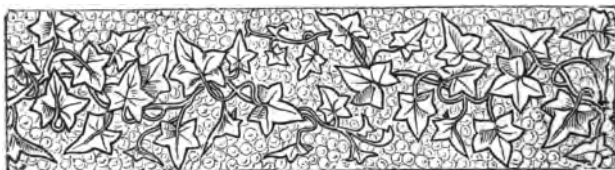
She declared herself very well satisfied with my terms, and promised to recommend me to her friends; adding that there was never a good workman but what was bad-tempered or 'imperant,' and that, for her

part, she preferred a hasty word to a sour look any day.

‘As for the painting-brush,’ says she, in conclusion, ‘I will take it immediate to the Old Hall, and I’ll tell Miss Adams who found it; and I warrant she won’t let you be a loser by your honesty, and as like as not will put another shilling on top of mine for the doorstep.’

I wondered how Miss Adams would like to hear these eulogies.





CHAPTER V.

OF MR. ADAMS, AND HOW FALKLAND CAME
TO REVISIT HIS OLD HOME.

TO dissipate the fancies which had taken so strong a hold upon my imagination, and to clear my mind for the work of the morrow, I resolved that I would not so much as look at the medallion of Miss Adams that evening ; and, having need of a finer chisel than I could find amongst the tools of handy Joe, I walked to Maidstone, where I bought a fairly good tool, returned to the inn, and then, tired with my fourteen-mile walk, I fell asleep the moment I got into bed, and

slept without dreaming until the morning.

I was up betimes, and repaired at once to the church. The sexton's wife paid me a visit in the morning, and, after saluting me very civilly, told me with some indignation that Miss Adams had sent me nothing for finding her paint-brush—though she admitted that she prized it above all others, and had felt so concerned for its loss that she intended inquiring for it herself—and notwithstanding that she, Mrs. Blight, had broadly hinted to her that workmen always expect to be rewarded for their honesty.

‘Hows’ever,’ says she, ‘I think I know what’s right, though I’m not the richest in the parish; and there’s an old coat—and not so old neither, come to that—as is as good as any shilling as was ever minted, and you shall have it before you go away—that you shall.’

No one else came to interrupt me, and I worked with such expedition and success that the restoration was completed by three o'clock in the afternoon, even to the staining of the new part in keeping with the old. I was well satisfied with the effect, and Chives, arriving a little later, was so delighted with my performance, that he pulled out his purse and paid me my five guineas on the spot, though he could not help fetching a sigh or two as he weighed the purse in his hand afterwards and returned it to his pocket. Indeed, it seemed to me a little cruel to take such a sum for so small a piece of work, especially when I reflected that Master Tommy and perhaps the handy Joe would have to suffer for it; but my necessity would not allow me to be very punctilious in the matter, for without money I should be compelled to accept any kind of work I could get in London, and

might for a long time have to live from hand to mouth, without any chance of bettering my position ; whereas, having a few guineas to furnish me with the necessities of life, I could afford to give some weeks to finding an engagement in which I could employ my abilities to the best advantage. I was anxious to get to London without delay ; but there was one pleasure which I could not deny myself before leaving Maplehurst, and that was the casting of my medallion.

Leaving Mr. Chives in the church, I went to the sexton's, and spent an hour in repairing his doorstep ; after which I returned to the inn. I found a very handsome chariot, with a pair of splendid horses, standing before the door there, and, on entering the house, perceived that my landlady was entertaining a visitor in her private parlour behind the bar.

‘ Ah, here he is ! ’ cried she, catching sight

of me and rising from her seat. 'Step inside here, if you please,' added she, stepping into the bar, 'there's Mr. Adams from Adams's Hall wants to speak to you.'

I own that this announcement caused my heart to flutter considerably, and, as I entered the parlour, wondering what Miss Adams's father could have to say to me, I looked at him with great interest.

It was impossible for a man to be more unlike my preconceived idea of Mr. Adams than the gentleman I saw ; for I had fancied him to be a spare, delicate person, with features bearing some resemblance to his daughter's, at least in their expression of refined and cultured feelings ; whereas I found him a gaunt, ungainly man, with a face which had no claim either to physical or intellectual beauty. His colourless skin was slightly pitted with the small-pox ; his mouth was large ; his nose was long and ill-

shaped ; and his eyebrows, which were exceedingly thick and jet-black, had that peculiarity which is commonly supposed to be the characteristic of a villain—they met. Nor did his dress belie the expression of his commonplace cast of features by any notable instance of good taste ; for though his clothes were doubtless of the very richest material and best make that money could procure, they were as ill-suited to him as the plumage of a bird of paradise would be upon the awkward body of a goose. His appearance reminded me of the ridiculous figure which is sometimes presented on the stage, when a manager, for lack of means, makes shift to dress his carpenter or scene-shifter in tinsel and velvet, and sends him on to represent a prince or a duke. From his wig to his shoes, Mr. Adams was over-dressed. There was too much fine lace on his ruffles and jabot, too many diamonds on his fingers, in his

brooches, and in the watches and seals that dangled from his fob. It was a figure to delight a cynic, for he all unconsciously burlesqued the fashion of the day.

‘How d’ye do, sir?’ said he, extending his hand and smiling with an expression of frank good-humour that made his plain face pleasant to look at. ‘Rare good weather for the hay crops, ain’t it?’

‘Good weather for everything,’ said I, catching the geniality of his tone.

‘Why, so it is, to be sure. Lord! how the young peas are coming on! If the slugs and the sparrows will only let ’em alone for a fortnight or three weeks, there’ll be a plenty, I’ll warrant. But that’s not what I have come here to talk about. May I make so bold as to ask you, sir, if you have anything particular to do this evening?’

‘Nothing that cannot as well be done to-morrow morning.’

‘Then, in that case, would you mind coming to Adams’s Hall with me?’

Doubtless my face expressed the astonishment I felt upon receiving this strange invitation, for he hastened to explain that he wished to have my professional advice concerning some alterations he was about to make in his house.

‘My architect and me,’ says he, ‘has agreed to what should be done; but my daughter, Delia, will have it we’re wrong, and that I ought to get the opinion of an artist before I have the old house pulled about; and likewise she would have me come down to find you out, being mighty certain that you are no simple mason, but a real artist.’

‘Aye, that he is!’ cries the landlady, with a wink at me by way of encouragement. ‘As you will say, sir, when you see the piece of work he did t’other night. Run upstairs,

young man, and fetch it down for the gentleman to look at. It is a portrait of your young lady, sir, and prodigious like, to be sure, which this young man made of a piece of clay all out of his own head.'

'Did he though?' says Mr. Adams. 'Well, the parson tells us we're nought but clay, but it is not every man could use his head to such a useful purpose.'

He laughed very heartily at his own joke, and the landlady joined him, though without exactly catching the drift of his words; but it was her business, good soul, to laugh at her customers' jokes whether she understood them or not.

I ran up to my room and fetched the medallion, which Mr. Adams no sooner cast his eyes upon than he burst into loud exclamations of approval and astonishment.

'Tis my own dear Delia to the very life!' cries he. 'Dash my wig, but 'tis marvellous

to think that a bit of brown clay could be made to look so beautiful ! 'Tis prodigious ! Tut, tut ! Clay, as I live ! There's the pretty lips of her, and the round chin, and her sweet delicate cheeks. Heart alive ! it needs but the eyes to be perfect. A bit of stiff clay as you couldn't grow a carrot in—well, well ! 'Tis a better portrait than ever was took, and I've had a mortal lot done, too. But most of these artists make her mouth smaller and her eyes larger than what they are, and 't isn't possible to alter the real look of her face without spoiling of it. Why, how came you to do it, sir ? She told me nothing of sittings, which most artists make so much fuss about.'

'Miss Adams knows nothing about it,' said I. 'Tis done from memory. Hers is a face not easily forgotten.'

'That is true, sir. Be the girl out of my sight, her image is in my mind ; and the

longer she is absent, the more distinctly it stands before me. 'Tis a wonderful face, is it not, sir ?

‘ 'Tis very beautiful.’

‘ Aye, but not a bit lovelier than she deserves. You'll find a many good plants with very ordinary blooms, and a many fine blooms on a mean sort of plant ; but with Delia 'tis otherwise. Body and soul she is lovely. She has the best heart in the world, sir ; and so she had when her ways were a little wild and capricious. But she's less headstrong now she's took to painting and the like ; and if she's a bit wilful one moment, she makes up for it the next by being doubly lovable. But, Lord, why need I praise her ? her nature is in her face for e'er a one to read as has eyes in his head. You saw what she was when you did this, sir.’ He looked at it in silence a moment or two ; then, with some hesitation, he said : ‘ I

suppose, now, you have no idea of selling this, as one might say.'

I told him I had no intention of selling it.

'You're in the right, sir,' says he. 'If I had it, no money should buy it; and I'll not insult you by offering money for it.'

'As it is,' said I, 'tis liable to crack in drying, and would crumble in the course of time; but I intend to cast it, and you shall have a copy, and welcome, since it pleases you so much.'

He expressed his gratification, and shook me heartily by the hand; after which he repeated his proposal that I should advise him as to the alterations in Adams's Hall. I promised to be at the house in an hour's time, for, proud as I might have been at another time of my workman's dress, I was reluctant to present myself to Miss Adams before I had changed my smock for a decent coat and waistcoat. Mr. Adams would have

sent a coach to fetch me, but I assured him that I knew the house and preferred to walk. As I know now, he himself would rather have walked across the smooth meadows than be jolted over the rough road in a coach ; but he considered it as unbecoming to his position to go a hundred yards beyond his estate without engaging the services of two horses and a couple of stout servants.

I blacked my shoes carefully, and brushed my clothes, which were of good make and material and still presentable, though now ten years old ; but I had worn them in Italy only on fête days, and, except that they were a little faded and threadbare in parts, they were as good as ever they had been. And when, having combed my hair and tied it with a fair riband, I came to survey myself in a hand-glass, I was sufficiently satisfied with my appearance.

It was not without considerable agitation in my heart that I entered by the gates and approached the house which had been my home for so many years ; but I own that my mind was less concerned with the retrospect than with the immediate prospect of seeing Miss Adams. She was walking with her father on the bowling-green, which lay upon the north side of the house and near the entrance ; and I question if either of them recognised me at the first moment, for they had seen me in my smock and white with the dust from my work. But as I approached them, taking off my hat with the best grace I could muster, Mr. Adams cried : ‘Od’s butterkins, ’tis our gentleman artist !’ and stepped forward to meet me.

Miss Adams gave me her hand with frank cordiality, and said something which I cannot for the life of me remember ; and I replied in words which I am quite sure were

worthy only to be forgotten. She wore a coquettish garden-hat trimmed with pink and turned up on one side, and this set off her creamy skin and dark hair to perfection. Her face was prettily tinged with colour, which may have been reflected from the silk lining of her hat, or have come there from her heart. The sleeves of her dress were short, and revealed arms the whitest and most beautifully modelled that I ever saw in nature. Her neck was covered with a fine handkerchief, and a little bouquet of lilies was fastened upon her bosom. The train of her gown swept the lawn, and gave additional height to her graceful figure.

She knew that she was beautiful, and she knew that my eyes were admiring her, and a little look of gratified pride came into her face, such as one might expect to see in the countenance of a young queen receiving the homage of her subject. It was not in the

least like the expression I had seen upon her face before—the contemptuous pride with which she had coldly stared at me after overhearing me ridicule her pretence to art.

We both played different parts in each other's eyes. To her, I was no longer merely a mason ; to me, she was no longer merely an aspiring young artist. That may account for the vastly different behaviour which I exhibited on these two occasions.

We went round to the terrace in the front of the house, where Mr. Adams pointed out the alterations proposed by his architect.

‘He’s for having all those bay-windows took out,’ said Mr. Adams, with a sweep of his hand, ‘and that three-cornered sort of buttress with the little door on the basement, that’s to be took out too. Then those three curly edged gables are to be cut

off, and the chimneys took down. Then he's going to fill up all the corners, and make everything nice and square. Likewise he will make the windows square and regular, and glaze them with the best crown glass. Then he's going to cut a fine door in the centre with a portico in front, supported by massive Doric pillars, or Corinthian, if preferred. Then he's going to cover the whole face of the house with cement, so as to make it look like stone. When that's all done, this silly grass is to be covered with beautiful slabs of marble all along the terrace; and there's to be a marble balustrade the whole length, with a flight of marble steps leading down to a fountain that's to be stuck in the middle of the lawn. Then there's to be a row of statues along the terrace—that's something in your line, you know. Then—well, I think that's about all for this side of the house.

Now, sir, tell me, don't you think that will be mighty fine ?

'To speak candidly, sir,' said I, 'twill be, in my opinion, prodigiously ugly.'

'That is what I think,' said Miss Adams. 'I like the bay-windows, and the quaint gables and chimneys, and the red bricks.'

'But, my dear,' expostulated Mr. Adams, 'tis in the Jacobin style, I am told, which is nought but a mixture of Gothics and Tudors, and I know not what ; whereas altered 'twill be, the fellow tells me, pure Greek, which is all the fashion now amongst folks of good taste. To be sure, your taste must have changed for the worse, for when we were in Greece nothing would content you but to be drawing some broken-down church or shattered pillar and you was for ever trying to make me understand how noble and beautiful they were. I do assure you, sir,' he said, turning

to me, 'there are a dozen books full of such drawings as she took in Greece, and Rome, and Italy, and Athens, and those out-of-the-way parts where we have been travelling these last two years. Why, my dear,' addressing his daughter, 'surely you know that everything must be good that's Greek. Do you think they would build museums for a parcel of rubbish if it wasn't Greek? You, sir,' turning away from his daughter to me—'you ought to know what's what, and you admire the Greek style of building?'

'Yes,' said I, 'in Greece;' and I then proceeded to point out my reasons for considering that style of architecture unsuitable to the Weald of Kent.

He listened very patiently, and then said :

'To be sure, what you say about our climate, the surrounding country and all

that, is true enough, and I quite agree with you that a house of false stone is as contemptible as trinkets of false metal and false gems ; and I shan't hold out for the Greek style, especially as my Delia here seems to hate it fully as much as you do. But still, a man with a lot of money is bound to spend it, and he can't expect people to respect him if he lives in a house just as he finds it, and puts up with what he can get, like a man with no money at all. I *do not* want people to laugh at me, you know,' he added with much emphasis. 'When they come to see me I want 'em to find something that will please 'em. I want 'em to enjoy 'emselves and be nice and pleasant and amiable, which could not be if they was continually seeing something to find fault with. That's why I jumped so readily at Delia's suggestion that we should have the advice of an artist, for you must certainly

understand these things ten thousand times better than I can pretend to do. And now that the architect's notion is not to be carried out, I shall take it as a very great favour, sir, if you will undertake to superintend the alterations, and see 'em carried out according to your notions of what's right and proper. Money is no object,' he dropped his voice to a confidential murmur. 'Ten, fifteen, twenty thousand pounds I am quite willing to spend on this matter, and I need not say that whatever your fee may come to, it will be discharged without question asked. You can begin when you like: me and my daughter are only waiting here until the arrangement is made, and then we shall go to London—I have taken a house in Park Lane—and there we shall put up during the summer with the hope of coming here for a breath of fresh air towards the

autumn, if you think you can get all done by that time.'

I was so astounded by this proposal that I stood in silence until he recalled me to myself.

'Well, sir, what do you say?' he asked.

'I shall be most happy to be of service to you,' I began.

'I thank you with all my heart, sir,' he cried. 'And now, sir, tell me what alterations you will make. I warrant you'll put t'other man in the shade.'

I looked up at the beautiful house that I loved so well, at the terrace, and the lawn, and then I said :

'If you take my advice, sir, you will not have a brick of that house touched.'

'What! no alteration of the house?' he cried, in amazement.

'None, sir; 'tis pretty, and appropriate to the surroundings, and it fulfils your re-

quirements ; for here is nothing to excite ridicule, and nothing wanting to gratify the tastes of those whose tastes are worthy of consideration.'

' But the terrace, and the balustrades with the statues—you don't object to them ? Statues, you know, are something in your way—statues, marble statues.'

' No, sir. They would be out of keeping with the house, and nothing is more pleasant to walk upon than this short turf. You might have a fountain in the lawn, if it is fashioned in keeping with the house, and a balustrade in place of the hedge at the bottom of the garden might be added—a broad running ledge just high enough to sit upon in an idle moment when the country tempts one to linger and look at it ; but have no statues. That is all that I can advise, and your architect, whose business it is to please his customers, will carry out these sugges-

tions better than I can ; for I have not studied the subject.'

Miss Adams said nothing, but I saw that she approved of my advice ; as for her father, this sudden check to his spending twenty thousand pounds seemed to be a most bitter disappointment to him ; his long visage was ludicrous in its rueful expression.

'Twill cost no more than six or eight hundred pounds,' said he, in a tone of dejection. 'I beg you, sir, to come within doors and see if no alteration can be made there.'

We passed through the doorway and entered the vestibule by the great staircase. Here he paused, and looking up, asked me what I thought of the stairs ; to which I replied that I thought it the most beautiful staircase that I had ever seen in a dwelling-house ; which, indeed, was no exaggeration,

for the banisters are most excellently carved.

‘But,’ says he, ‘’tis only wood, and never a coat of paint upon it. What say you to having ’em gilt?—everyone admires gold.’

‘Not everyone,’ said I. ‘Miss Adams, I take it, would prefer to see the fine oak rather than a garish display of metal leaf.’

Miss Adams readily coincided, and we passed from the vestibule to the drawing-room, where he would have had the dark panels torn away, and a gay paper hung. And thence we went from room to room, with no better result as far as his wishes were concerned; for I would agree to no alteration, and Miss Adams supported all that I said in favour of leaving the house in its present condition.

‘I perceive,’ said he, when we came to the end of the inspection, ‘that ’tis beyond my capacity to understand the ins and outs

of this matter, and that, left to my own guidance, I should quickly make my house the laughing-stock of all who saw it. I thank you heartily, sir, for your advice, which has saved me doubtless from a great deal of mortification in the future, but which places me in a very awkward predicament at present. For, you see, I hoped to offer you a piece of work that should be worth accepting, and it turns out that I've brought you here on a fool's errand, as one may say.'

I assured him that I was well repaid for my trouble by the pleasure of doing him a service, and was bethinking myself how to retire, when a servant came and announced that dinner was served, whereupon Mr. Adams asked me to take a seat at his table. The poor man seemed so earnestly to desire that I should accept his hospitality as some sort of recompense for my services, that had

- I felt less disposed to linger in my old home and in the society of Miss Adams, I could not have refused his invitation.

I offered my arm to Miss Adams, which she took with a graceful movement of her pretty head, and I led her into the dining-room without the slightest feeling of embarrassment; for though it was sometimes necessary for me to recollect that I was a poor mason, I never forgot that I was by birth and education a gentleman.





CHAPTER VI.

MR. ADAMS REVEALS HIS DAUGHTER'S
CHARACTER AND SOMETHING OF HIS OWN.

A VERY prim, straight, white-haired old gentlewoman was seated at the table. She rose from her chair and made a deep courtesy at our entrance. She was, I found, a kind of governess and companion to Miss Adams, and had occupied that position since the time of the young lady leaving boarding-school. Miss Adams introduced me.

‘Miss Dobson,’ said she, ‘Mr.——’

‘Falkland,’ said I.

‘Falkland!’ cried Mr. Adams. ‘Well,

now, that is prodigious odd, to be sure ; for I must tell you, sir, that the last residents in this house were of that name. Indeed, the house was called after 'em, Falkland Hall, till I bought it, when I thought I might as well give it my own name ; so I called it Adams's Hall. My Delia and Miss Dobson will have it that I should say " Adams' Hall " ; but, as I tell them, if I call it that, people will think my name's Adam, and that will give rise to all manner of jokes. Folks are so fond of poking fun at me.'

He paused, tapped the table with the handle of the carving-knife to command attention, said a grace with much solemnity, and then, continuing his observations upon the necessity of guarding himself against ridicule, which he appeared to fear greatly, he proceeded, standing, to carve the sir-loin.

The conversation turned upon the travels

which they had just completed, and upon the works of art they had seen in Italy. Miss Adams admitted that most of the paintings had disappointed her.

‘I expected,’ said she, ‘that the pictures would strike me at once with the beauty of their form and colour; but in most cases I found drawing which seemed to me faulty, and colouring which seemed to me extravagant. Of course, that was my fault. I believe that, if I had looked at them with the knowledge that they were the expression of a sublime idea, I should have found a great deal to admire.’

It struck me that this observation resulted from our conversation in the church, and her subsequent reflections upon it.

‘I don't know much about these matters, to be sure,’ said Mr. Adams; ‘but I counted twenty-two Holy Families on one wall of a church, and hang me if there was two of

'em alike ; so you can't say those old artists was partic'ly good at portraits, can you ? Right in the midst of these sacred people, sir, was a portrait of Venus, who, as I am told, was a remarkably handsome young woman in her time. Well, I don't know how she might have looked when she was properly dressed ; for in the picture, I assure you, sir, she had nothing on but a necklace and a hat with a feather in it, which——'

'Pardon me for interrupting you, Mr. Adams,' said Miss Dobson severely, 'but may I trouble you for a little gravy ?'

'To be sure, ma'am. Mr. Falkland, how are you doing ? Delia, my dear, you're not hearty to-day. A little bit down here ? Well, as I was saying, Mr. Falkland, those old fellows couldn't paint anything but portraits, as far as I could see, and couldn't do them well ; and I wouldn't give one of my daughter's little paintings not

for ten hundred thousand of these *Italian* things.'

When the port was put on the table, Miss Dobson rose with a significant glance at Miss Adams, who at once followed her example. The elder lady went to the door and made a profound courtesy ; the younger, standing by the table, nodded playfully to her father, and made me a bow with a bewitching smile in her face, that seemed to say, 'We shall meet again presently,' and the two left the room.

Mr. Adams followed his daughter with his eyes until the door shut her from his view, and then, turning to me, he said in a tender tone :

'It does my heart good to see her. She has the carriage of a princess, and as for looks, is there e'er a Venus going can compare with her ?'

'No,' said I, catching his enthusiasm.

And, faith, I meant what I said ; for Miss Adams had, mingled with her archness and beauty, an innocency and purity which Venus never knew.

‘If you could put yourself in my place, sir,’ said Mr. Adams, leaning back in his chair, ‘you would experience a most wonderful feeling of joy in seeing that young girl growing every day more beautiful in body and soul. I have had a good bit of anxiety about her, but now I feel like a mariner who has taken his craft through many dangerous shoals and perilous passages, and brought her into a fair, smooth anchorage, as one may say. I thought at one time of bringing her up in a simple country fashion, but I came to see that what suited me wouldn’t suit her. Fond of young things, like rabbits and chicken and kitten and the like, she was, to be sure ; but they wasn’t enough for her. She was for ever running out of

bounds, and losing herself in the lanes, looking about for she knew not what, but something more than she could find in the house and garden—striking up friendships with all the children she met, no matter of what sort, and venturing in places where she was forbidden to go. Folks who had child'en, and knew how to keep 'em in order, said I was sp'iling her, and that she needed strict management. So I sent her to school—right away from me. It was a bitter struggle that, I do assure you, sir. The school-teacher was told to be strict with her, and did no more than her duty ; but Delia couldn't brook harsh treatment, and the long and short of it is, that, one night in November, as I sat in my kitchen wondrous lonesome, with an empty pipe and a family Bible, I heard a knock and a little whining cry at the door, and, on opening it, there I found the child, half dead with

hunger and fatigue and fright, she having leapt out of a window in the early morning and run away from school, and walked a distance of sixteen miles without touching a morsel of food, and lost her way more than once. They had put a dunce's cap on her head the day before, and stood her on a stool for the children to laugh at, and that so wrought upon her sensitive feelings that she could not sleep a wink the whole night for thinking of her shame. She told me she would throw herself out of window if I sent her back there again. There was no fear of that. I put her to another school though—for I always did see the importance of education, sir, from my own want of it—and I bade the good woman to treat the child kindly, which she did; and, in gratitude, the little one took to studying with all her might and main, and got on wonderful. That sort of opened my eyes, as you may

say. I came to see that a'most half the mischief in the world arises from forcing others to do what is contrary to their dispositions and a'most the other half from our trying to get what is denied to us ; and the truth of this I am more certain of every day I live ; for, to be sure, sir, if we get all we want, there's no temptation to do wrong.'

I could not help smiling at the simplicity of Mr. Adams's logic ; but, not noticing me, he continued :

'So when she came home to spend her birthday with me—she was then fifteen—I took a favourable opportunity and sounded her inclinations. We were sitting, as I remember, in the summer-house at the bottom of the garden, with the flower-borders running down each side of the path all as bright as a poppet-show, and the peas just coming into flower, and as fresh and healthy as may be, and all the garden looking wonderful wholesome and

sweet. I had been smoking my evening pipe, and she, a bit tired with running about all day, had seated herself alongside me with her hand under my arm, and her pretty little head resting just there on my shoulder. I can never forget that moment, sir, as long as I live, nor the dreamy look in her sweet eyes as she looked out at the distant hills where the sun had sunk ; and I told her how I hoped she would grow up a good and happy woman, and I asked her plump what sort of life she would like to lead. She wasn't a bit surprised by my question. She had grown a deal in the last year, and she was thinking about the very same thing at the moment, I fancy. She just pressed my arm a little, but said nothing ; so says I, "Would you like to live always in the country, pretty?" She gave her head a little shake, and said she didn't think she could be happy to live always in the country ;

she didn't care for needlework, nor for making puddings, and the neighbours were all so stupid and bound up in their own affairs of killing pigs and sending cows to market that they seemed to live only for their cows and pigs, which is true enough. She thought she should like to go about in a show—you must understand, sir, she was young, and had never seen anything better than a fair in the way of amusements—or else she should like to play very beautifully on the harp, or else paint pictures like that I had bought of the gent who did the signboard of the Setting Sun ; at any rate, she must do something to occupy her thoughts, and keep her striving to do something quite well. She knew, she said, she shouldn't like to be poor, and have to put up with mean things and mean people.

‘ Well, sir, I pointed out to her that folks who go about in shows are generally

poor and mean also ; but I took care not to wound the child's feelings by laughing at her notion ; and then I promised that she should have the best masters for music and painting that money could get, and that whichever occupation upon trial she found most to her tastes she should follow. But Lord, sir,' cried Mr. Adams, suddenly abashed, 'all this rigmarole can have no interest for you.'

'Indeed it has,' said I ; 'pray continue.'

'Well, sir, in the next year the child grew to be a woman, as one may say ; and, as I take it, the chief cause was a wonderful gift for painting as she was found to have. She threw herself into the study heart and soul, setting all else aside for it. When she came home at the half-year, and I saw how desperate she was for being a painter, I made up my mind, once for all, as to the future ; and when the year was finished, I found a

suitable companion for her, Miss Dobson—and a regular gentlewoman she is, I assure you, with mighty fine notions of the proprieties—and we went abroad, all three, after I had bid farewell to my old friends at Cheshunt and taken a last look at my garden. For you see, sir, I had made up my mind to give up the old simple life I had been indulging in.'

'That was a sore trial for you, I take it.'

'To be sure, sir, it was a bit of a hardship at the time. I had lived there in content for a matter of eight or nine years, and got kind of well rooted in, as you may say. My garden was the admiration of everyone as saw it ; my house had all I wanted for myself and any friend who chanced to drop in, and I was looked up to by the entire parish. They made me a vestryman, sir—fifty-nine votes against thirteen—and then a churchwarden ; and I was treated with the greatest respect possible,

not only by the ratepayers, but by the parson and the squire too. Nothing was done without asking my advice, and they always came to me first when there was a subscription to be made.' Mr. Adams drew himself up in his chair, and his countenance glowed with becoming pride as he recounted this part of his history. 'I had the honour of putting a new spire to the church when the old one was knocked over by lightning, and I was permitted to make a new road which bears my name at this very moment. I've seen my name in print, sir, in letters as long as my finger. When I spoke in the vestry, no one opposed me by a single word. You may say, sir, that this is pride. Well, I will not deny it; and I will own that I did feel down-hearted a bit in giving of it all up; especially when I found myself in a foreign land where no one would understand a word I said, and my own countrymen laughed at

me. And then, you know, for a man who's been used to sitting in his shirt-sleeves with a clay pipe, when he had nothing much to do, pitching a quoit, or having a friendly bout of skittles of an evening, and doing a couple of hours' digging before breakfast, 'tis mighty unpleasant to be always wearing a fine coat ; and doing nothing from morn till night makes one wondrous heavy and dull, especially after dinner. However, that's nothing. I shall get to like it heartily after a bit, I warrant. The main thing is to do my duty by the girl, and keep her from wanting anything she can't get ; for was she not content and happy, you may be sure, sir, that not all the honours in the world, nor all the gardens and clay pipes could make me so. Ad's my life ! have I cause to repine a single moment when I see her as she is now—beautiful, and good, and happy ? He was silent for a moment ; and then, ' 'Tis a terrible thing, sir,

said he, ' when a young woman ceases to be happy, for frequently it results in her ceasing to be good. There is a craving in our nature after happiness which must be gratified by any means that are at hand, just as there's a craving for sunlight in plants ; and young-folks with no experience are not always able to judge of what is real happiness, or what are the justifiable means of getting it. I've seen 'em, sir—I've seen 'em, sir—the fairest and most promising young souls, sacrificing truth, affection, sincerity, self-respect—everything—to obtain happiness, and gaining nothing but the husks of it. God forbid my Delia should make such a bad bargain as that ! She shall not, if so be 'tis in my power to gratify her wishes. That's why I am so determined to do the thing thorough. If she wants society, she shall have it, and the very best as is to be had for money. The entertainments at my house shall be as

good as are to be had anywhere—and better, if possible. There shall be the best wines, the best music, the best victuals—the best of everything, so that a markiss or a dook may put his legs under my table and be satisfied.’

We talked upon this subject for some time, or rather he talked, for my position only allowed me to drop in a word now and again ; and then he stopped to apologize once more for ‘plaguing’ me with his personal cares.

‘I have talked about my child,’ says he, ‘because I can think of nothing else, though maybe I should not have said so much to another person in your place. There be some folks that one can never converse with save about the crops and the weather, while there are others that one must open one’s heart to at once ; and you, sir, are one of them. Besdies, sir, the portrait you have made of Delia shows that you take a deep interest in her, and can enter into my

anxieties for her welfare ; so that there's a fellow-feeling betwixt us, as one may say. And sure-ly 'tis more pleasant to talk about a subject that is agreeable to both than to waste words on matters that one doesn't value of a straw.'

I answered that I was quite of his opinion, and that I was glad to have gained his confidence so readily.

'Yes, sir,' says he, 'I feel I can trust you—not simply because you have declined a piece of work which might have brought you in a thousand pounds or so, when at the same time you will turn an old woman's doorstep for a shilling, for that is an act of honesty which might be expected of any honest workman ; but because you wear in your face the signs of a generous disposition and delicate feelings, without which, was a man never so honest, he would by so much fall short of being a gentleman. In talking

of my daughter I have said nothing of which I am ashamed, and nothing which I could ask you to conceal ; yet I feel sure that had I betrayed anything which it would be against her interests or mine for the world to know, it would be as safe in your keeping as though the matter had not been mentioned.'

With these words he held out his hand, which I took and pressed with a most hearty feeling of goodwill. Then I rose to depart, saying I wished to make a mould of the medallion that night, in order that it might set sufficiently to take a couple of casts from it in the morning.

'If that be the case,' said he, laughing, 'I will not detain you, for I am as anxious about this portrait as you. I have told Delia nothing concerning it yet, minding that you should see her pleasure and surprise. What time, think you, will it be done?'

‘By eight to-morrow morning.’

‘Good!’ says he. ‘We breakfast at nine. You will share the meal with us, and see the effects of your handiwork in my child’s bright eyes. What say you, sir?’

My first impulse was to accept this invitation; but a dozen good reasons for declining it succeeded, and so, after a little stammering, I told Mr. Adams that I was anxious to get on to London, and that my affairs would not allow of delay. His countenance fell at this.

‘I have seen,’ says he, ‘just so much of you as makes me anxious to see a great deal more. However, sir, far be it from me to stand for one moment between you and the good fortune which I hope awaits you in London. I’m afraid I have taken up too much of your time already, sir.’

Upon the terrace we found Miss Adams walking with Miss Dobson. The young

lady wore now a black lace shawl thrown over her head and shoulders in the Spanish mode ; behind her was the primrose and pale green sky, in which the first star was twinkling. Seen from a little distance, with that background and the still surroundings, she looked like the Genius of the Twilight ; and the beauty of the picture cast a spell upon me, so that when we met I could say nothing.

‘ Mr. Falkland is going, Delia,’ said Mr. Adams.

‘ Good-night,’ she said, with the same bewitching look in her eyes I had seen there as she left the dining-room. ‘ ’Tis not good-bye, now.’

‘ But you won’t see him to-morrow,’ said Mr. Adams. ‘ He’ll be on his way to London before you are up.’

‘ So soon !’ cries she, in a tone of soft regret—the smile dying away from her face.

‘He cannot even stay to take breakfast with us.’

‘But you will if I ask you,’ said she, the bright light twinkling again in her eyes.

I thought of the danger of yielding to that seductive voice and those bewitching eyes. I stammered out some excuse—I know not what.

‘My dear Delia, Mr. Falkland has business to think of,’ remonstrated Mr. Adams, ‘and business must be considered before everything.’

‘If Mr. Falkland thinks so, we must say good-bye,’ said she.

The taunt did not alter my resolution, and I held out my hand, saying ‘Good-bye.’

‘Good-bye,’ she returned coldly, giving me the tips of her fingers, and making me at the same time a very formal courtesy.

Mr. Adams accompanied me to the gate. As we turned by the corner of the house I

looked back ; Miss Adams was no longer on the terrace.

It was but the pique of a spoiled child who had failed to get her desire, the resentment of a coquette whose pride was wounded ; yet it made my very heart ache to compare this cold farewell with the warmth of our previous parting in the church. I would have liked to take away the memory of a last sweet look, of the gentle pressure of her hand ; yet did I feel that for our mutual peace of mind it was well that she had no stronger feeling than that of a child or a coquette.

‘Pshaw !’ thought I ; ‘’tis not worth thinking on. I am not in love with her, nor she with me. The utmost I could expect from her was mere politeness. ’Twas unreasonable to imagine that she would look after me when we had parted. I will think of her no more.’

But I continued to think, all the same ; and when I came to the stile in the meadows, from which one can see the terrace, I looked across eagerly, with the hope of seeing her there. Mr. Adams stood on the walk alone. I heard him call Delia, and loitered along the path, hoping she would come. But she did not.

I recalled to mind an Italian apothegm—‘ A woman worships her master and whips her slave ;’ and I wondered if my behaviour in this last interview with Miss Adams had led her to consider I was no longer the master I had seemed to her in my mason’s blouse.





CHAPTER VII.

LORD KESTRAL; HOW FALKLAND ENCOUNTERED
HIM IN THE PARK, AND HOW HIS LORDSHIP
UNDERTOOK TO GUIDE HIS NEPHEW ALONG
THE ROAD TO PROSPERITY.

I MADE a mould from the medal-
lion before going to bed, and
took a cast from it the next
morning. I was standing with the plaster
in my hand, admiring, not my work, for
I was now dissatisfied with it, but the face
it represented, when I heard the sound of a
foot upon the stairs, and the next moment
some one knocked at my door.

‘Come in,’ I cried ; and Mr. Adams, dressed as handsomely as if he were going to a reception, though the hour was but a little after seven, entered the room.

‘I have come so early,’ says he, shaking my hand, ‘because I am impatient to have the portrait for one thing, and because I wanted to see you again for another.’

I handed him the cast at once, and he regarded it with many expressions of admiration and delight. The perfect whiteness added to the purity of the face, he said ; and he vowed, he should not be content till he saw it mounted in a handsome gold frame.

‘’Twill be a surprise indeed for Delia,’ says he ; ‘and I warrant will cure her of her megrims !’

‘Is Miss Adams unwell ?’ I asked.

‘Ay,’ says he ; ‘I know not what upset her, but there was no getting a smile out

of her last night ; and she complained of a headache, and went up to her chamber before the candles were lit. However, this will chase away her gloom to a surety : and I only regret you will not be by to receive her acknowledgments, and I warrant she'll be just as sorry in having no opportunity of making 'em to you. But you will come to see us in town—will you not, sir ?

I declared that nothing would give me greater pleasure ; and indeed I felt at that moment quite ready to sacrifice all my good resolutions for the sake of seeing Miss Adams again ; and had her father at that moment renewed his invitation to breakfast at his house, I should not have had the strength to refuse it.

‘ I will write the address,’ says he, ‘ if you will have the goodness to find me a pen.’

I ran downstairs, and fetched a sheet of paper and the ink.

‘I have paper,’ said he; and then he very carefully wrote, in a good bold round hand, his name and London address on the folded paper he had found in my absence. This done, he slipped the paper in my hand, and was for shaking hands and going at once; but having my suspicions, I opened the paper and looked within. It was a bank-bill for a hundred guineas.

‘Sir,’ said I, ‘I cannot take this!’

‘Then, by the Lord!’ cries he, laying down the cast, ‘I’ll not take this, though I value it at an hundred times the worth of that bit of paper.’

‘The portrait is a gift.’

‘And I took it as such. I do not pretend to pay for it; ’twould spoil the pleasure I have in taking it. Lookee, Mr. Falkland, I asked you as a matter of business to give me your professional advice concerning the alterations of my house;

you gave it, and 'tis for that I offer you this trifle.'

' 'Tis out of all proportion to the service. I cannot accept it.'

'Sir, I beg you to keep it. You will make me feel that I have offended the man I most wished to serve if you refuse it. I do beg you, sir, to keep it, if not as payment, as a resource to fall back upon if you are in need; for 'tis difficult to rise without money. Pay it back if you will when you are rich enough to do without it; but for Heaven's sake, sir, put it in your pocket, and say no more about it now.'

Beads of perspiration stood upon his face as he spoke, so agitated was he with his fear of my refusal; and seeing how grievously it would wound him to be denied, I clapped the bill in my pocket with a laugh, and held out my hand. He caught hold of both my hands, and shook them heartily, while his

honest eyes beamed with satisfaction ; and then, taking up the cast as if it were the most precious and fragile treasure in the world, he descended to his carriage, which was waiting before the door, and was carried away, nodding and smiling at me from the window.

After finishing the door-step for the sexton's wife, whom I greatly astonished by refusing to accept the coat she would have made me take as a recompense for my honesty in the matter of the paint-brush, I paid my score at the inn, and shouldering my bundle, trudged by way of Maidstone, Malling, Wrotham, etc., to Greenwich, where I arrived late at night, fairly tired, but in good heart.

The adventures of the preceding days had provided me with abundant food for rumination as I wandered along. My good luck concerned me very little, nor did I

give much thought to Mr. Adams, much as there was in his character to excite astonishment and curiosity. I dismissed him from my mind as a simple, good-hearted, honest, uneducated man, suddenly possessed of money which he knew not how to spend, and sorely puzzled to understand his daughter, and to find means to protect her from pitfalls which presumably had been fatal to his wife.

It was Miss Adams whom chiefly I recalled to mind, or rather who came unbidden there and commanded my consideration. I went through again, with delicious emotion, the scenes that had passed between us. In imagination I saw her again in the church—imperious, disdainful, enthusiastic, humble; I saw her on the lawn in her training gown and the hat that suited her so well, tricked out with all the cunning art of dress to enchant the eye; I saw her standing still

and silent in the twilight—a solemn and noble figure—suddenly to change like a sprite, and appear with all the archness and witchery and wilful petulance of a born coquette! I took exception to many of her varying moods, yet I knew not which I would dispense with, for one without the other lost piquancy and charm; so I finished by falling heartily in love with all, and admiring her character as much for its faults as its perfections. The day was showery, and as I looked round upon the meadows and woods glistening under the pearly clouds, their fresh and tender beauty seemed to my mind to typify Miss Adams, whose charms as far excelled those of the Italian women as this English landscape surpassed the brilliant, bold, and arid beauty of Italian scenes.

Should we ever meet again? I asked. Would she listen to me as she listened in

the church ? Would she again try to make me her captive ? Ah ! would she even remember me if we met again ? Beautiful and wealthy, she would have a hundred suitors at her feet, and would she turn from them to look at a poor mason ? With that I fell to thinking of my prospects—of the likelihood of rising to fame and fortune as a sculptor—of seeking her then, and being met with kindness—and of a thousand other unlikely things. When I stopped at Gravesend for refreshment, I found I had a blister on my foot ; but I forget all about it as I continued my journey and thought of Miss Adams ; nor did sleep put an end to my romantic dreams.

The next day I reached London ; and, my good genius not forsaking me, I had the luck to find employment with Mr. Rogers, the sculptor, within twenty-fours of my arrival.

For the first week I gave my services on trial, and contrived to give my employer such satisfaction, that at the end of that time he engaged me for three months at a salary of two guineas a week. The work I had to do was not of a high order, for it required nothing but skill and care; but, as Mr. Rogers pointed out, I should learn the usages of London studios, and profitably occupy my time while looking about for something better.

In Florence I had never a holiday from year's end to year's end, except for the Carnival; but now, thanks to the excellent usage of our Protestant religion, every Sunday gave me a day for relaxation. Here then was an opportunity offered me of visiting Mr. Adams and his daughter; but I let the weeks pass by without going nearer to Park Lane than the Mall; and, lest I should be unduly credited with wisdom in

avoiding the young lady who had so inflamed my imagination, I must confess that my chief reason for doing so was that I felt ashamed of my clothes and dared not to be seen in them by her. They had served me well enough for ten years, and I had never once found fault with them in Florence—or, indeed, given them two minutes' thought—but now I perceived that they were woefully dingy and out of fashion; and as for my linen blouse, which I had once been so proud of, I would as soon have presented myself before Miss Adams in my night-shirt as in that. Nevertheless, when I walked in the Park my eyes were for ever spying among the crowds of fashionable people for Miss Adams and her father.

One Sunday—it was the fourth since my arrival in London—as I was sauntering along the broad walk, glancing this way and that, I perceived an old beau coming to-

wards me, whose face and mien seemed not unfamiliar to my eye.

He occupied the middle of the path, and, with his arms well away from his side, was taking a pinch of snuff. With a most elaborate flourish of the right hand he carried the pinch to his nose, and with another flourish he tapped the lid of his box. This done, he was in the act of flourishing the box into his fob when, from his natural infirmity or some luckless mishap, it slipped from his fingers and shot down at my feet. With a genteel curse the old gentleman turned to the servant who followed a few paces behind, and was directing his attention to the accident, when I picked up the box and presented it. He took it from me, looked at my clothes to see what degree of gratitude it was necessary to express, and then, in a tone of lofty condescension, said :

‘ Ah ! thank you, my good fellow, thank you ! ’

I knew the voice, and recognised the speaker.

‘If I am not mistaken,’ said I, ‘I have the pleasure of speaking to Lord Kestral.’

‘I am Lord Kestral,’ said he, in a good-natured voice—a little heightened in tone, maybe, to catch the ears of passers-by; ‘and who may you be, my poor fellow?’

‘Why, who should I be, my lord, but your own nephew, George Falkland.’

‘Falkland, Falkland—George Falkland!’ said he, dropping his voice, and glancing with some dismay from me to the fashionable folks who, seated along the edge of the walk, seemed to be taking a good deal of interest in our affairs.

‘Surely you remember me, my lord,’ said I—‘your brother Richard’s son, who wrote to you from Florence but a short time since?’

My uncle seemed not best pleased with

the recognition, and somewhat abruptly turned out of the crowded walk into a deserted side-path, after reluctantly giving me a couple of cold fingers to shake.

‘I suppose you are my nephew,’ said he, ‘but I’ve such a cursed bad memory, I can’t recollect you.’

‘You may remember that I wrote to your lordship asking the loan of a few guineas to bring me to England.’

‘Not I. Where’s my fellow? he may know. However, that’s of no moment. The main thing that concerns you, I suppose, is to have a few guineas now,’ said he gloomily, as he fumbled in his pocket for the readiest means of getting rid of me.

‘Thank you, my lord; I have no longer any need of assistance. I have money in my purse, and stand, as I hope, in a fair way of making my fortune.’

I admit that my hopes were considerably

in advance of my expectations, but I was anxious to disabuse my uncle's mind of the belief that I had stopped him with a view of drawing upon his charity.

'Making a fortune !' cried he, with much more civility than he had yet shown. 'I am heartily glad to hear it. I would have given you what guineas I have in my pocket, but, egad !'—he glanced to the right and left, and dropped his voice—'I should have suffered for it. So you have money, eh ?'

'Not much ; but I have more than enough for my present wants, and there's a fair chance of making more.'

'I am charmed to hear it. You shall tell me all about it. I'll have you to dine with me at my apartments in Bond Street—not to-day, for I made arrangements to dine abroad—but another time : something quite plain, you know—soup, fish, a little

poultry or game, with just one or two side-dishes, hey? a bottle of French wine to begin with and a pint of port after, hum?' My uncle gave a little gulp, as though the thoughts of such a dinner had set his mouth watering; and then, coming back to realities, asked how long I had been in town, and what I was doing.

I gave him a brief account of my struggles in Florence, of my present position, and the means by which I hoped to rise to fame and fortune.

'Fame is one thing,' said he, 'and fortune is another; but still the two do occasionally go together. I cannot say I have a high opinion of artists; but there is nothing degrading in your occupation: 'tis a profession, though a mean one. The best artist we have can boast of nothing higher than a knighthood, and a poor remuneration for all his hand and brain

can produce. He expends all that is in him on a picture or a statue; he sells it, and there's an end of it, so far as his gain is concerned. But the same amount of ingenuity and perseverance employed in the service of the ruling minister would get him maybe a barony, a sinecure, and a pension.'

Coming to a seat, my uncle, after taking a glance to the right and left to see that no gentlefolks were in the walk, bade me sit down with him. He then made further inquiries into my circumstances; and being well pleased with the account I gave of them and of my expectations, he promised to stand by me and give me the benefit of his guidance, without which he assured me I should never rise above the rank of a mechanic. He proceeded to give me a specimen of his advice, and evidently found such pleasure in laying down the scheme

for my advancement that I had not the heart to show him how impossible it would be for me to carry out his ideas.

‘You are my nephew,’ said he, ‘and may count yourself my heir; and though you are not likely to get much by my death, you cannot fail to derive immense benefit by your relationship while I live. I possess a title, and, although I am at present unable to keep an equipage, I may flatter myself that no nobleman is more widely known and respected than I am.’ Without any false modesty he said a good deal more to this effect, and then, returning to my affairs, he proceeded: ‘The first thing to be done is to get a decent coat to your back. No man can succeed who does not study his dress. If you dress like a beggar, you’ll be treated like a beggar; whereas to him who dresses like a prince, all things are possible. I will tell you why genius

goes in rags and tatters—'tis because genius has not the common-sense to wear purple and fine linen. You, my boy, if you are wise, will do better. You will first get a handsome suit of clothes ; they will put you in a position at once to take a fine house. A fine house will enable you to procure rich furniture, and with a well-furnished house you will have no difficulty in getting a coach and horses. You will put your servants in livery, of course. Then we will drive in the Park, and I will introduce you to persons of title and distinction. I shall spread the report that you have a prodigious talent for the Arts ; and that, together with your clothes, your equipage, your good looks, and the fact that you are my nephew, will excite curiosity to see your house. There you will fit up a study in the most handsome manner possible, and in some unique but picturesque costume you will practise

your art and receive visitors at the same time. That will require some address ; but I will instruct you carefully, and I doubt not you will have the ability to acquit yourself to advantage. You will become the talk of the town. It will be the fashion to visit your study, and converse with you at your work. I shall take care to let it be known that though you yourself do not concern yourself in mercantile matters, your works are to be had through such and such an agent. Then it will be considered a sign of bad taste or a want of means to be without an example of your art, and your agent will be besieged by clamorous purchasers ; and they who would not give twopence for your best work if they thought you were in need, will think themselves fortunate to get your worst for a couple of thousand pounds.'

Despite the gravity of my uncle, I could

not restrain my mirth at the fanciful picture he had drawn of my future career.

‘I am not aware,’ said his lordship stiffly, ‘that I have said anything ridiculous.’

‘Pardon me, my lord ; but you overlook the fact that I have not above fifty guineas wherewith to purchase all these fine things that are to make me the idol of fashion.’

‘Pshaw ! do you pay rent before it is due, or your tradesmen’s bills before the goods are delivered ? And think you shopkeepers are so dull to their own interests as to hand their effects over to a bailiff when, ’tis as clear to their eyes as ’tis to mine, that by waiting humbly they’ll be well paid for their venture ? Egad, I envy you your chance, and would willingly change places with you !’ cried he, with a short husky laugh ; ‘for you’re

beginning to make your fortune, whilst I am mighty near the end of losing mine.'

'I am sorry to hear that,' said I. 'Surely your lordship must have made some bad speculation ; for I was given to understand you had married the widow of a millionaire, and not so many years since, neither?'

'Tis true!' said he, with some excitement. 'I did marry the widow of a millionaire ; but I was robbed. Do you hear me, sir ?—robbed !'

'By whom ?'

'By a thief of a servant. I lose my temper when I think of it. When we are alone, you shall hear all about it. By the way, nephew, where do you dine to-day ?'

'At my lodgings, sir. My landlady has undertaken to dress me a dish of boiled mutton by two o'clock.'

‘Boiled mutton!’ said my uncle, with a gulp; ‘and ’tis now on the stroke of half-past one. Boiled mutton!—an excellent dish at this season of the year. There’s nothing I eat with a greater relish, nothing—in the simple style.’

‘In that case you may perhaps give me the pleasure of your company?’

‘That I will!’ he replied with alacrity; ‘for I see very clearly you will need my help on the road to prosperity.’





CHAPTER VIII.

FALKLAND ENTERTAINS LORD KESTRAL WITH AN ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF.

WE rose and took the path into Piccadilly ; and here, wishing to spare my uncle the shame of being seen walking with a man in a shabby coat, I hailed a hackney-coach, and bade the driver carry us to my lodgings. This arrangement, I saw, gave my uncle great satisfaction, and for more reasons than one. For though he walked without the aid of a stick—which, as I discovered later, he had relinquished as

soon as he began to feel the need of it—and carried himself as erect as a drum-major, he walked with the portentous slowness of one whose joints are stiffening with age.

He professed to be heartily disgusted with the condition of the vehicle and the pace at which it travelled; nevertheless, as we passed through St. Giles's, I believe he was well pleased to be seen riding in this humble conveyance by the poor people, whom he regarded from the window with an air of seigneurial superiority. The behaviour of his servant, who seemed to share his lordship's ridiculous pride, was not less amusing. Perched on the box beside the driver, he folded his arms and carried himself with such imperturbable gravity and rigidity as might have been expected had the equipage been a chariot-and-six.

I lived in a turning off Oxford Road, where, in addition to a bedroom and sitting-room on the upper floor, I rented an out-house, where I worked in the morning, before going to my employer's studio. My landlady, Mrs. Jilks, was a notable good woman and the widow of a Churchman, who, forming an estimate of my condition by my frugal habits and the state of my linen, which though scanty was of fine quality but sadly in need of repair, doubtless concluded that I was an unlucky wretch who had lost my friends and fortune, and had nothing to hope for in the future but pity and buffets.

She took care to have her rent the moment it was due, and in performing those offices which were indispensable, she displayed an air of Christian resignation, as though performing an act of voluntary charity ; for the rest, she let me wait upon myself, hinting

that Heaven helps those who help themselves, and that it was my duty to give as little trouble as possible.

When this estimable person was told by the little maid who opened the door that I had taken a couple of gentlemen up to my room, and desired that an extra cover should be set on my table, she bustled upstairs in a pet, exclaiming against beggars on horseback, and declaring that she was not the woman to fly in the face of the Holy Scriptures by slaving for whatever raff I chose to bring into her house on the Lord's Day; but no sooner did she catch sight of my uncle's magnificent habit, and hear him addressed by his title, which his man took occasion to mouth every time he spoke, than she altered her tone, and, dropping a courtesy, begged him to have a care that he did not set his foot in the broken board on the landing, which should have been mended had I only let her

know I was going to have visitors of quality; she then assured me that I should be served with her best in the twinkling of an eye, and ran downstairs as quickly as she had bustled up, but with vastly altered feelings towards me. My uncle, who perceived the change in her tone, took the occasion to draw a moral from her behaviour.

‘Here, my dear,’ says he, ‘you see the effect of dress and position; and, believe me, though this woman may be less tutored than others of superior station, she is not one whit less prejudiced or more blind than they. ’Tis the common weakness of humanity, by which they may profit who will.’

Pilcher, Lord Kestral’s man, having unbuckled his master’s garters and loosened his stays, was on the point of being dismissed to get his dinner at an eating-house with a shilling, which his lordship, having

no change, had borrowed from me, when Mrs. Jilks, coming up with the tray, begged she might be allowed to entertain him in her parlour; his lordship acceded to this request with a careless wave of his hand, and slipped the shilling into his own pocket, happily forgetful, as it seemed, that it had come out of mine. Knowing the woman's inquisitive disposition, I thought it advisable, when she and her guest left the room, to acquaint Lord Kestral of the fact.

'Have no fear,' said he; 'Pilcher has learnt his lesson, and values appearances as much as I do. For his own sake he paints my character in glowing colours—indeed, I never had a servant who knew his business better in the matter of lying to my advantage.'

My landlady having set the table with the best she had—crowding it with a vast

quantity of treasures from her closet, of which we could have no possible requirement, such, for example, as a china caudle-cup and a silver candlestick—placed the boiled mutton before us, together with a mug of strong ale, which she had drawn unbidden from her own cask, and my uncle and I fell to ; and surely, had the table been furnished with all the luxuries of a French court, his lordship could not have eaten with greater zest.

My uncle said but very little until his appetite was appeased ; then, glancing at the remnants of our feast and round the bare walls, he said :

‘ We shall smile to remember all this when we are seated at your table with a glitter of silver and crystal before us, and surrounded by all that is elegant in upholstery and rich in decoration.’

‘ Possibly,’ said I, ‘ if that day comes.’

‘If it comes? It must come, and that within six months.’

‘That depends upon my ability, and the appreciation my work meets with.’

‘A fiddle-stick’s end for ability! So that your work is not monstrously bad—and from the success you have achieved with that coat on your back, I take it that your merits as an artist are high—there can be no doubt of its being appreciated to the utmost of your wishes.’

‘It may still be a long while before I enjoy the luxuries you hint at.’

‘Why, sir, have I not made it clear to you that you can have your house, your equipage, your servants, as soon as you choose to take them?’

‘Perfectly,’ said I.

‘Well, then, what d’ye mean by your “if’s” and “depends,” and the rest of it?’

‘To be plain with your lordship, I mean

that I shall take nothing until I have the money in my pocket to pay for it.'

'What romantic folly is this! Is it not sufficient that you pay for the things when you've got 'em? Does the sharpest rascal amongst these shopkeepers demand more than that?'

'It is quite possible that I should be able to pay for everything I chose to take if I sold my work for prices out of all proportion to its value.'

'Heyday! Can you tell me the worth of a rose-noble, sir?' asked my uncle, with some warmth.

'Sixteen or seventeen shillings originally, I believe.'

'Well, then, that man's a rascal who let me have this that I carry on my chain for thirty shillings, and I should be a knave to sell it again for more than its original value! Gad's my life! would you have me to

understand that you take my suggestion to be dishonourable ?

‘Our views are so opposed, my lord,’ said I, not wishing to offend my visitor, ‘that I opine neither of us could follow the other’s guidance without violation to his sense of wisdom or justice ; thus I, without being a madman, might lay down a course which you would consider it madness to follow, and you in perfect honour may suggest a line of conduct which my principles will not permit me to adopt.’

‘Very well put, my dear,’ said his lordship, shaking me by the hand, for he seemed fully as anxious as I to avoid a rupture. ‘I doubt if I could have said it better myself. I see you have studied the metaphysics ; and your argument is very sound. However, I have no doubt but that you will see this matter more clearly when you are cool ; the dinner has heated you, so we will

forsake argument at present and return to it—say—to-morrow. I will only add that I hope your principles won't prevent your buying a decent suit of clothes.'

'You will be pleased to hear that I have already been measured by a tailor.'

'I wish I had been by at the time. None of your Lincoln cloths nor your shovel collars, I do trust.'

'You may depend on it, sir, I have chosen a cloth and a fashion suitable to a gentleman.'

'I'm glad to hear it, with all my heart,' said his lordship, again pressing my hand to prove his good feeling; 'for amongst other crazes with which men of genius are afflicted, is that of dressing as nearly like chairmen as is possible. With a good coat to your back I can still hope. However, as I see you are yet a little heated; we will change the subject. Let us talk of something pleasant.'

‘By all means,’ said I readily, for I was growing weary of the subject. ‘Your lordship was good enough to say you would tell me of the mischance by which you lost your fortune.’

‘Why, that’s a pleasant subject with a witness!’ he cried, with a short laugh. ‘I’ll give you the history, nevertheless, for it may serve to show you the danger of those romantic sentiments which I perceive with regret you are but too inclined to foster. Besides,’ adds he, ‘there is a relative pleasure in it for me; for ’tis like letting blood for an inflammation to recount one’s wrongs and give a vent to one’s choler.’

So saying my uncle pushed back his chair from the table, crossed his thin legs, and looked out of the window, as if to collect his thoughts before beginning the narrative.



CHAPTER IX.

LORD KESTRAL ENTERTAINS FALKLAND WITH
AN ACCOUNT OF HONEST DAVIE.

IT would have been difficult to say how old my uncle was, for he neglected no art by which the ravages of time upon his features and person could be concealed, and he was careful to preserve an unvarying serenity of countenance, that no crease or wrinkle might injure the artificial surface of his skin. There was a peculiar waxy smoothness about his face that betrayed the use of unguents and cosmetics, and it was obvious that his teeth were false and his eyebrows stained; yet

the eye was so cheated, that despite the knowledge of these artifices one could not believe he was past his sixtieth year. A watery affection of the eyes, which obliged him at intervals to use his handkerchief, was the only infirmity not to be concealed ; but even this he contrived to make less noticeable by keeping his eyelids half closed, in an indolent languid fashion, which went very well with the affected placidity of his expression ; and this served a double turn, for his eyes were the worst feature in his face, being small, colourless, and evil-looking when, as I now saw them, he permitted the lids to separate to their natural extent.

I was observing these characteristics when, suddenly turning from the window through which he had been looking for some moments, he asked :

‘Did you ever hear anything concerning Mrs. Walsingham ?’

‘Mrs. Walsingham—never to my knowledge.’

‘Hum! then I will begin by telling you something about her. What Mrs. Walsingham’s maiden name was I never gave myself the trouble to inquire; possibly she never had a just title to any. When I first knew her, ten years ago, she was the handsomest woman in London, and she was then seven-and-twenty; probably she was still more beautiful ten years before that, which explains a good deal of what happened about that time or a year or two later. A young woman of eighteen or nineteen, beautiful as she was, and, as far as I can learn, entirely without relatives or friends, must have been besieged by half the young bloods in town, and subjected to temptations which perhaps one girl in ten thousand could overcome. Well, sir, one fine day this little person in the bloom of her youth, healthy, high-

spirited, volatile, and an admirable actress—an admirable actress,’ repeated his lordship with a significant leer, after stanching a tear from his eye, ‘marries an old gentleman of sixty-five, and giving up her liberty and its lively delights, goes to live at Southgate, in a house as much like a prison or a mad-house as any house you ever saw.’

‘Why on earth did she do that?’ I asked.

‘I can’t tell you with certainty. She told me that she was compelled by her guardian to marry the old fellow; but I never saw, nor have I ever heard of anyone who had seen her guardian, and I make it a rule to disbelieve anything which that lady asserts. The man she married was named Bond. He was a silversmith and banker of Lombard Street, and a millionaire according to the general belief. Most wealthy men are millionnaires by reputation. One thing is certain—his wealth was very great; for he

sold his business—some years after his marriage—for thirty thousand pounds; and as he lived with the simplicity of an anchorite, and had not a soul in the world to hamper him, he must have amassed an enormous sum in his forty years of buying and selling and cheating and lending. Possibly this young woman had reasons for wishing to be married; possibly she was dazzled by the glitter of Mr. Bond's gold. Probably she thought she could do what she liked with an old man who was weak enough to fall in love with her after so many years of celibacy; probably she expected to stay but a very short time in that Southgate home, and knowing the power of her charms, believed she could lead her old husband by the nose, bring him to London, establish herself in the midst of society, and indulge in all the diversions of a fine lady at his expense. But in this she was vastly at fault. Mr. Bond

may have been a fool as her lover ; but he was wise enough as her husband. Likely enough marriage had cured him of his folly—it has brought many another fool to reason. It is certain that he did not lose his money in addition to his wits. No, no ! The man who is keen enough to make a fortune is generally shrewd enough to keep it, you will find. As soon as the honeymoon was over, he resumed his old regular business habits—going up to town by the coach of mornings, and coming back again of evenings without varying an hour.’

‘But what did he do with his wife ?’

‘What did he do with her ? Why, he kept her fast in that hideous gloomy house, just as he might have secured a treasure in his strong box to guard against being robbed of it. The scales must have dropped pretty quickly from his eyes, and discovered the character of the young woman he had

kind, and doubtless Mrs. Bond smiled her sweetest in thanking Honest Davie for his gift. At any rate, he was so far encouraged that before the week is out he makes a flower-border before her window and plants it with things that he must either have stolen or paid for out of his own pocket, for Mr. Bond disclaimed any part in the proceeding when his wife thanked him for what she believed was his kindness. Honest Davie's next performance is to scrape and clean up some garden-tools and lay them in Mrs. Bond's way, that she may amuse herself in poking and raking the beds about. There was nothing whatever to amuse her within doors—not a book, not a picture, nor an instrument of music—nothing at all. Gad's me, 'tis as dull and prison-like within as without, that house at Southgate ; so Mrs. Bond accepts these suggestions, and potters about her flower-bed, and listens to Honest Davie's

Georgics ; and finally, when the baby is born, and winter puts an end to the delights of grubbing about in the garden, the faithful servant gives money to Mrs. Bond to enable her to desert her husband. What think ye of that ?

‘ His affection was at least disinterested.’

‘ How do you know ? The cunning rascal had good reasons, as you will see, to alienate the wife from the husband at a moment when the birth of a child might have created a new and stronger tie between them. And mind, I do not profess to give you an exact statement of all that took place at that time. I have no authority but the word of Mrs. Bond ; her assertions are utterly unreliable, and it is only by winnowing out the few statements that seem true, from the mass that are palpably false, that I get material to form an approximate history of her career. To continue : Mrs. Bond, after

various unimportant vicissitudes, joined a troop of strolling players, relinquishing the name she had forfeited the right to bear, and assuming that of Walsingham. For three years she travelled over the country, playing in barns and tap-rooms, and living a vagabond, careless life, which I have no doubt suited her tastes to a nicety ; and then Mr. Richmore chancing to be present at a performance, he was so smitten with her beauty and her talent, that he at once offered her an engagement at the little theatre in the Haymarket. She accepted, and in the winter of '86 made her first appearance before a London audience as Miss Prue in "Love for Love." Her success was immediate and complete. I was present, and I confess that I was as thoroughly carried away by her acting and her good looks as anyone in the house ; I led the applause from my side-box, and at the

conclusion of the performance I went into the green-room to pay her my compliments. She was pleased to receive me most graciously, and from that day I became her very constant attendant. I make no secret of it, my dear, that woman captivated me—and made a slave and a fool of me, as she did of a dozen others. I was an imbecile under her influence ; I believed every word she said ; I pitied her ; I admired her virtue ; for I must tell you that, though she liked gaiety and fine clothes, and would visit Ranelagh and Vauxhall, or go to a ball or *ridotto* whenever she had the chance, there was nothing in her conduct which could be spoken of—in my hearing—to her disadvantage. She professed to look upon me as her father, and I was so lost to all sense of dignity that I accepted to play the farcical part she assigned me. She would go nowhere without me, and I have been

kept standing about a ball-room from mid-night till morning, while she danced before my eyes with—with men who care for that kind of exercise. It was thus the designing hussy kept *me* assured of her virtue and sustained my esteem and passion. It was thought at the time—as I have heard since—that our relations were of a more warmly intimate kind; but I assure you, my dear, there was no truth in the report. In the first place I had no means to offer her support, as with the loss of my seat in Parliament went my only chance of redeeming the money I had spent in procuring that and my title. Kestral Hall is a ruin, which I have no means of repairing, and which no one will purchase, for every stick of timber is cut down, and it stands in the midst of a waste; 'tis with much ado I get a few guineas by letting the grounds for the grazing of sheep. In

the second place, Mrs. Bond was far too wise to lose the prize she was scheming for by any act of indiscretion. Why, sir, she never suffered me to cross the threshold of her door ; and, just as she kept me by her side as a protection against other gallants, so she kept her abominable brat with her whenever we went in a coach as a protection against me.'

My uncle calmed his emotion with a pinch of snuff, and continued :

'Matters had been going on in this wise for nigh upon two years, and my imbecility increased rather than diminished, when one day she came to me weeping—she could cry as readily as she could laugh—and told me she had heard that her husband was dying, and asked me if I didn't think she owed it, as a duty to her son, to go to Southgate and beseech Mr. Bond to forgive her. I heartily supported this proposal, and the following

day I put her in the coach at the Flower Pot in Bishopsgate Street, and saw her depart with her son. In the evening, when I met her again at the theatre, she told me that Mr. Bond had refused to see her, but that Honest Davie had promised to intercede in her behalf, and hoped he would be able to induce the old man to make some provision for his widow. Three days later a curious incident occurred. It was my custom of an evening to chat with Mrs. Bond in the green-room for half an hour before the rising of the curtain. On this night, after cooling my heels in the green-room for some time, I went upstairs to see if she had left her dressing-room. The door was ajar, and expecting to find the room empty, I opened the door without knocking. There I found Mrs. Bond seated, with a man kneeling at her feet and holding her hand. With a few polite

words I excused myself, and descended to the stage in a state of mind which I need not attempt to describe. At first I determined to leave the house and never see the woman again; but, on second thoughts, I resolved to wait and see if she could offer any explanation. Between the acts she came to me, and, with a vast show of agitation, she said, "My lord, Mr. Bond is dead." Then, after a moment's silence, she added, "And I have given my promise to marry the man you saw kneeling at my feet." "What man is that?" I asked, astounded by this strange combination of news. "Davie," said she. "The servant—the gardener?" I asked. "Yes," said she; "he brought me the news. My husband has left nothing either for me or my son. All is given to Davie, every penny. And the simple fellow, being now a widower, has asked me to share it with

him—a million of money. He says 'twas his master's intention to atone for his harsh treatment and neglect, and to give me a husband and his son a father, and that he so left his money that I might be induced to accept a man who has a true affection for me." Now,' said my uncle, turning to me, 'tell me what you think of that disposition.'

I reflected a minute or two, and then I said :

'Extraordinary as it looks at first, it seems to me the wisest and most humane thing Mr. Bond could do. He felt it to be his duty to make some provision for his son's education and for his wife's maintenance ; possibly he felt that he had caused her, by his own act, to quit him, and that some atonement was necessary. But, doubtful of Mrs. Bond's prudence, he saw that it would be unwise to place her in unrestricted possession of a large sum

of money. He had implicit faith in Davie's honesty, and knew of his affection for Mrs. Bond; and he saw no better way of providing for her happiness and his son's welfare than by placing the money in Davie's hands, with the suggestion that he should marry Mrs. Bond and be a father to her son—that seems to me an ingenious and wise arrangement, which might very well be made by a man shrewd and discerning, such as Mr. Bond seems to have been.'

'That is precisely what I thought, my dear. But what seemed to me irreconcilable with this theory was Davie's honesty in executing his master's suggestion.'

'You would not grant that a servant could be honest in any circumstances?'

'No; and the event proved that I was right in my estimation. But what at that moment convinced me that he was playing

false cards was this: he had insisted upon Mrs. Bond giving an immediate answer to his offer, and upon the marriage being consummated within a week.'

'Possibly he felt it his duty to carry out Mr. Bond's wishes before any accident could arise to frustrate them,' I suggested.

'Let me proceed,' said my uncle impatiently. 'A solution of the mystery had occurred to me. In the first place, I extorted a promise from Mrs. Bond that she should not marry Davie until the will of her late husband had been proved. Then I went to the expense of instructing a lawyer to represent Randolph Bond—Mrs. Bond's son—and to attend the formal reading of the will on the day of the funeral. On the evening of that day the lawyer informed me of what had taken place. A great many gentlemen, who had known Mr. Bond in business, attended the funeral,

and subsequently returned to his house with Mr. Bond's lawyer to hear if they were to receive anything by his will. When they were all assembled, the lawyer rose, and said that he had to inform them of a somewhat peculiar fact. A few days before his last, Mr. Bond had made a will, leaving his house and all it contained to his servant Davie. That will Mr. Bond himself had taken charge of. Since his death a complete search of the house and investigation of his papers had been made, with a view to finding the will, but without success. As the will bequeathed all the property to Davie, and no one but he had been in the house, it was impossible to attribute the disappearance of the will to foul play. The conclusion that seemed to him probable was that Mr. Bond, in his last moments, touched with pity for his wife and child, and with remorse for his past

neglect of them, had himself destroyed the will. In the absence of that will all Mr. Bond's property fell to his son, whose representative was present; and it was his duty to place the estate at once in his hands—in a word, my dear, my supposition was verified. Davie knew that the will had been destroyed—knew that the property would go to the boy, and made a bold stroke to get the widow and have the control of that money during little Randle's minority.'

'How did this discovery affect Davie?' I asked, after considering the matter for some moments in silence.

'It seems he sat as silent as a fish all through the proceedings, and would scarce say yea or nay when spoken to.'

'Is it possible Mr. Bond could have been so deceived in this man's character?'

'He had a cunning rogue to deal with—a

rascal whose guise of simplicity deceived everyone. Now, my dear, I come to a new development of events. Despite this proof of Davie's duplicity, Mrs. Bond maintained that she must keep her promise and become his wife. Her nerves seemed to be greatly shaken, and I attributed her emotion to finding herself thus suddenly put in possession of an enormous fortune. For she heard nothing but rumours of the immensity of her husband's riches from those that surrounded her, and everyone courted her as though she were a queen. Still she persisted that she must marry Davie—now because he had been so good to her in her unhappiness, and now because, if he was the villain I declared him to be, she should fear his revenge if she failed to keep her promise. At length, to put an end to these tortures, I offered her my hand, and to play off Davie, I proposed that we should be privily married

at Doctors' Commons, and go at once to Paris. This proceeding on the part of a man of my experience and cautious habits doubtless seems to you rash and impetuous, but you must consider that there were powerful reasons for haste ; in the first place, passion brooks no delay, and in the second, had I not taken her at once, I should probably have lost her altogether ; for no sooner was it known that she was the widow of Mr. Bond, the millionaire, than her admirers declared the most honourable intentions, and I believe she might have taken her choice of a dozen men of good position, who were all ready to marry her at a moment's notice. She accepted me, and within forty-eight hours we were married and out of England. She had won the trick for which she had so skilfully played her cards. She was no longer a nameless adventuress—a player of doubtful antecedents ; she was Lady Kestral, and the

wife of a peer of England. I had given her name, position, and title ; you will presently see what I got in return. The lawyer whom I had instructed to represent Randolph Bond at the funeral undertook to examine Mr. Bond's affairs, go through his papers, and discover how his money was invested. He could give me no idea of the value of the estate, which, in consequence of its magnitude, would take some time to realize. The rascals are all alike ; they lengthen their bills in accordance with the length of the purse to be drained. I could afford to wait. The fellow did not hesitate to advance me a sum of money on my note of hand, when he had seen me married to Mrs. Bond, and he promised to communicate with me as soon as there was any news to tell.

‘ We made the journey to Paris in state, and you may fancy, my dear, the delight I felt in spending money freely after being

compelled to economise so long. I was prodigal ; I scattered my riches broadcast—the best was not good enough for me. Couriers carried the account of my munificence before us, and we were fêted like royalty in every town we stopped at. Naturally this ran away with the few hundreds my little lawyer had furnished me with, and the first thing I did upon arriving in Paris was to write to him for a fresh supply. A week passed, and then, as my wife and I were taking breakfast, the servant brought two letters—one for Lady Kestral, the other for me. I opened mine ; 'twas from the lawyer of Throgmorton Street. In a few words he excused himself from advancing the sum of money I had demanded, and returned the note I had sent him. I was stunned ; I couldn't understand what I read.

“I hope you have received no ill news, my lord,” says my wife. I looked across the

table at her with sudden suspicion. She was eating an egg, but she seemed to be paler than usual. Her letter lay unopened beside her plate. I could see the address was written in the same hand as mine.

“Be good enough to read that letter,” I said, “and let me know what your lawyer has to say.”

‘She assumed a smile of the most consummate complaisance, which was in itself suspicious, seeing that I was in a damnable rage—broke the seal, opened the paper, pretended to read, at first with indifference, then in perplexity, and finally with a scream she dropped the letter, and fell back as if in a swoon. I crossed the room and stood over my wife; the muscles of her face did not move, but she could not check the beating of her heart: her bosom heaved. I turned and picked up the letter.’

His lordship put his hand in his breast, and brought out a well-stuffed letter-case that clearly served more than one purpose, and taking out a folded sheet of thin paper, continued :

‘Here it is. I kept it as a security, and have carried it in my book for ten years—read it.’

My uncle handed me the letter of which the following is, as nearly as I recollect, the contents :

‘HONOURED MADAM,

‘In compliance with your instructions, I have proceeded to substantiate the claims of Mr. Randolph Bond to the estate of his father, the late Mr. Bond, of Southgate. As there is no opposition to the succession, and as the property is of much smaller proportions than it was originally thought to be, the matter will in all probability be

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very shortly settled. I have made a complete investigation of all documents, papers, etc., found in the residence of the late Mr. Bond, and made an inventory of all goods and chattels thereunto appertaining, but press of business has prevented me from making an exact valuation of the entire estate; roughly, however, I believe the total value may be set down at a figure between fifteen hundred (£1,500) and two thousand pounds (£2,000), of which the items are as follows :

Dwelling-house, forecourt, garden, etc., situate in Fox Lane, Southgate (say) . . .	£1,500	0	0
Plate, furniture, linen, apparel, and chattels, various (say) . . .	100	0	0
Cash in purse of deceased Mr. Bond	98	7	6½
<hr/>			
Total (say) . . .	£1,698	7	6½

Against this as off-set are unpaid bills as follows:—

Dr. Blandley	£15 15 0
J. Boans (undertaker)	10 0 0
	<hr/>
	£25 15 0

If, madam, from the above statement you are led to conclude that the great bulk of the property undoubtedly possessed within a recent date by the late Mr. Bond was feloniously made away with between the date of Mr. Bond's death and of the keys being placed in my hands, and, further, desire that the criminal party (or parties) be brought to justice, I shall have great pleasure in undertaking the case; but I am compelled to inform you that from the extreme difficulty which will attend the procuring of convicting evidence, the expenses must of necessity be very heavy, and such as I cannot encounter without a sufficient guarantee of repayment.'

'Where have you got to?' asked my uncle.

I told him.

‘That is sufficient,’ said he, taking the paper from me.

‘When I arrived at that point, I turned and looked down again at my wife. She was still playing her part; she had not stirred a muscle. “Madam,” said I, “as I perceive from the motion of your breast that you have only lost a certain portion of your senses, I will presume that you still retain the faculty of hearing. I have told you that I cannot endure fools; that should have warned you against making yourself my wife. For you are a fool, though for a time you have had the cunning to make me believe you were something higher in the scale of intelligence. You *knew* that your son had but a paltry sum to inherit; you knew that your husband’s money was already in the possession of his servant. But you thought it would be more to your

social advantage to marry a lord than a thief. You made a mistake—a great mistake, as you shall find by experience; for the folly you have committed you shall repent as long as you have the lord for your husband and he has the fool for his wife.”’

His lordship spoke with vehemence, as if he were at that moment bending over the woman who had tricked him; then suddenly recollecting himself, he shrugged his shoulders and threw himself back in his chair.

‘But the thief?’ said I.

‘I have never set eyes on him since the night I saw his back, as he knelt at the feet of Mrs. Bond in her dressing-room.’

‘But surely you made some attempt to recover the fortune he had stolen?’

‘What attempt could I make? I was in debt already. I had no money to go on

with, even had I been tempted to throw good after bad. What chance was there of success? There was nothing to prove that Mr. Bond had not disposed of his fortune before dying; the man had disappeared from the neighbourhood, being turned out of the house the day my lawyer took possession of it in the name of my stepson! As a proof of the impossibility of recovering the lost fortune, not one of the lawyers whom I applied to would agree on any condition to make the undertaking at his own risk. If I had realized every scrap of property I possessed, the only use the lawyers would have put it to would have been the payment of their own bills!

‘And Lady Kestral—what became of her?’ I asked.

‘I will tell you,’ said my uncle, with a malevolent smile and a twinkle of his cruel eyes. ‘I took her back to the

empty house at Southgate—the prison she had found intolerable, even with honest Davie to comfort her—the home her first husband had given her ten years before ; that other old man whom she had thought to fool and bend to her desires. The shutters were fastened and barred. It was dark and dismal ; outside, the leaves were falling and the trees looked like spectres in the fog. It was growing late in the day ; our footsteps echoed in the house like footsteps in a sepulchre ; the place smelt damp and musty. I opened the first door I came to, and let her in ; upon my honour, I feared to penetrate farther into that dismal house. She clung to my arm as though I were a dear friend ; and when I shook her off, she fell upon the floor, unable to stand upon her feet, and there, without one single word, I left her ; and, as I quitted the house, I banged the heavy street-door behind me !'

‘Poor wretch!’ I exclaimed involuntarily.

My uncle glanced at me with raised eyebrows, then turned his eyes away with a contemptuous sneer.

‘She had her son with her?’ I asked.

‘No; there was no one with her. You see, in my belief, she deserved punishment; and that was the only punishment which she could feel, and which I could inflict without recourse to ungentlemanly violence. After a week I let her have her son.’

‘Surely she did not stay in that house?’

‘Faith she did, though, and there she is at this very moment. You don’t know what a careful woman your aunt is, my dear.’

‘But if the dreary house was intolerable to her the first time, it must have been as bad, or worse, the second.’

‘She was a child the first time; she was a woman the second—that made all the

difference. She was less impressionable and more discreet. She had taken some sharp lessons, and learnt prudence by being punished for indiscretion. She had everything to loose and nothing to gain by running away. She had talent for nothing but acting. She had no money, for you may be sure I was not more generous in that respect than her first husband. She must earn money to live, and there was no means but by returning to the stage. There she could never have recovered her position, even had I permitted her to keep an engagement. She would have been a subject for the contemptuous pity of her rivals, and that her vanity could not brook. Her beauty might still have won the men to her side; but what sort of treatment could she expect from them? A woman who has run away from two husbands cannot cheat the world

into a belief that she is a blameless martyr. She could no longer have commanded the Platonic affections of her admirers, and she was far too cold and calculating to live in infamy for the sake of its ephemeral gratifications. She could have done better than that in marrying the thief of a servant. But she played for higher stakes, and waits to win. I called her a fool, but, begad, I didn't know her when I said that; I protest, she commands my respect when I think of her foresight and crafty perseverance. She has accustomed herself to the dulness of existence at Southgate—gaiety may have begun to pall upon her appetite—she leads an irreproachable life, and cultivates the respectable virtues. Part of the house she lets to a family of Quakers—it agrees with their ascetic tastes—with the proceeds she contrives to keep herself, she has even given her son

some sort of education, bad enough, I'll be bound, and never once has she demanded money from me. Possibly she foresaw what was to happen; she is cunning enough, and was content to put up with hardships and wait.'

'Wait!—for what?'

'My death!—don't you see her object? She is still young; thirty-eight, and looks less. She has kept her good looks and her reputation in an excellent state of preservation; and when the day comes, she will put on the deepest mourning for me, pose before the world as an excellent and ill-used woman, gain acceptance in the best circles by means of her title, and succeed in marrying a third—fool! Only,' my uncle added, with an unpleasant little laugh, 'she may have to wait longer than she expected!'



CHAPTER X.

THE MORTIFICATION OF LORD KESTRAL.

LORD KESTRAL lay back in his chair, his hands nursed upon his thigh, his eyes closed, and the smile of complaisant satisfaction which was habitual to him upon his face : and I, turning my back upon him, fell to musing on his story and wondering why he had told it. If he thought to enlist my sympathies on his side, he did very unwisely ; for surely I must have lost my sense of honour, or all of my senses together, to regard his conduct in his own showing as

justifiable or even pardonable. I could not see that he was less blameworthy than the woman he had married, even supposing her to be as bad as he represented ; nor could I find that he was one jot better from a moral point of view than the thief Davie ; for, as he had barely mentioned the name of Mr. Bond's son, and spoken only of his own loss by Davie's dishonesty, I could not suppose that he had ever contemplated using Mr. Bond's fortune to the sole advantage of the boy whose heritage it was. I resolved that I would inform myself more particularly upon this point, and drop my uncle's acquaintance if his explanation was not satisfactory.

I must admit that in forming this resolution I was influenced less by principles of strict morality than by a feeling of dislike to my uncle, which I had taken during his narration, and which would have rendered

any plausible pretext for keeping him in the future at a distance acceptable.

In turning to speak to my uncle I was startled by the change in his appearance. His hands hung by his sides, his jaw was dropped, his cheeks fell in, his eyes were sunk in their caverns, the thin skin was stretched tight over the bones of the nose and cheeks—he slept. As I looked into that hard, cruel face, I said to myself that I need seek no further for testimony to the true character of his disposition. I did not disturb him ; but taking a book to the window, I sat me down and read for an hour.

His lordship was prodigiously amazed to find the light fading when he awoke, and annoyed that he had fallen asleep.

‘ Yellow as a kite’s foot, begad !’ cried he, looking at himself in the glass ; and then he fell to cursing the ale he had taken at dinner, and himself for drinking such poisonous

stuff, albeit no one could have more enjoyed it than he; and I heard him, when he was in the next chamber with Pilcher, cursing the fellow for his clumsiness all the time his disordered dress, his wig, his pads, and his straps, were being arranged. However, this bout of cursing seemed to have worked off his ill-humour; for he was as placid as the sea after a storm when he rejoined me, and did me the honour to say he should be very pleased if I would take him back to Piccadilly, fearing otherwise that he should never find his way out of the labyrinth in which I lived.

My landlady had thrown open her parlour door, and disposed a table with her best china upon it, so as to be seen in passing; and she herself, dressed in her best gown and a feather, came forward and made a most profound courtesy to Lord Kestral as we descended the stairs. She herself opened

the door, whilst the little drudge, who usually performed that office, stood by as a testimony to the condescension of her mistress. His lordship acknowledged this act of courtesy with a gracious inclination of the head; and taking a crown-piece from his pocket, dropped it with splendid carelessness into the hand of the little wench. Outside, he explained this piece of generosity to me. 'My dear,' said he, 'you are doubtless astonished by my extravagance in giving a crown to that girl; be not deceived by appearances. She will never get another farthing from me, though I visited you a hundred times, but the memory of that crown, and the hope of getting another, would ever keep her attentive and obliging; and the effect upon her mistress will be no less remarkable. A man who has a position to sustain must have at least the reputation for generosity and charity, and

I take care to buy mine as cheaply as possible. About once a year I give a guinea to a footman and a crown to a crossing-sweeper; and there's not a crossing-sweeper nor a footman in London who does not know it; and in consequence, between their hopes of getting a like gratuity by attention, and their fear of losing it by incivility, the rascals, to wait upon me, will turn their backs on a dozen indiscriminate prodigals who fritter away fortunes upon them in shillings and half-pence. Do nothing by halves; be large in everything. Let your meanest acts be handsomely done. To be treated like a prince, you must play the part of a prince. In crossing a crowded road, for example, never run; you will be plashed with mud from neck to heels, or get a cut with a whip for your temerity. Stand in the road, and, with a wave of your hand, you may

stop every vehicle that goes upon wheels until you are safely crossed.'

My uncle being now fairly engaged upon his favourite theme, proceeded to show by a great many ingenious and plausible arguments that a man, to be prosperous, had only to be pretentious, and to cheat with plausible audacity. And I walked along by his side, saying never a word, for as I could not agree with a single one of his premises, nor explain my reasons for differing without giving affront, I thought it best to hold my tongue. He seemed to accept my silence as a kind of homage, however, and continued to give me the benefit of his wisdom until we came into the Oxford Road, when, looking about him, he said :

'I begin to see now where we are. Prithee, my dear, which way are we going ?'

‘ Whichever road your lordship pleases to walk,’ said I drily.

At this my uncle pulled a long face, and cursing the Oxford Road for a barbarous out-of-the-world place, turned his face westward. I believe his sole motive in asking me to accompany him was to save his own legs at my expense. However, as there was no hackney coach or other vehicle within sight, he was spared the pain of finding my generosity behind his expectations, for I had firmly resolved that I would not spend another farthing, if I could help it, upon the old sinner.

We walked for some distance without meeting a coach, the old gentleman getting once more upon his favourite topic, when he stopped of a sudden, and exclaimed :

‘ Begad ! we must be near Tyburn, I take it. Pray, how d’ye think to get into Piccadilly ?’

‘We are not far from the Hyde Park, said I; ‘and if we take the lane on this side, ’twill bring us to the foot of Piccadilly Hill. ’Tis an extremely pretty walk, I assure you.’

‘Yes; and highly genteel,’ he replied, with a glance at my coat. ‘It may suit a young fellow with your poetic temperament and young legs; but I assure you ’tis not to my taste. Whereabout lies Soho?’

‘Behind us; we have passed King Street some hundred yards.’

‘Then thither I will return,’ says he; ‘but I will not hinder you from taking your ramble in the Park, for I recollect that I owe a visit to some friends in the Square, whom I should have great pleasure in bringing you acquainted with, were you more presentable.’

While we were thus discussing on the path a handsome chariot passed us, which

my uncle, who professed to know all the aristocracy in London, no sooner saw, than he declared he knew it to be Lord Sackville's, by the liveries of the servants behind ; and his perturbation was great when the coachman suddenly reined in his horses and drew up by the roadside within a dozen yards of us.

‘Gad’s me!’ cried his lordship, ‘I’m recognised to a dead certainty. Here, too ! How the devil am I to excuse myself ? Get out of sight as quick as possible, my boy, for the love of heaven !’

Without waiting for a second bidding, I turned on my heel, and was striding off, when a voice behind me called :

‘Mr. Falkland ! Hi, Mr. Falkland !’ and turning about, I perceived my friend Mr. Adams running towards me, and the fair face of Miss Adams peeping out of the chariot window.

Returning upon my footsteps, I met Mr. Adams within a couple of yards of where my uncle stood, looking as sheepish as may be at this unexpected turn of affairs.

‘I am heartily glad to see you, sir,’ said Mr. Adams, grasping my hand and panting for breath; ‘and, by the face of you, I believe you’re pleased to see me. But before I leave hold of your hand, you’ll have to tell me why you turned tail and strode off like a grenadier the moment I put my foot out of the carriage.’

‘To be brief,’ said I, ‘’twas my shabby clothes that caused me to turn my back on you.’

‘Then I have to thank your shabby clothes for a shabby compliment; for though no man values gentility more than I do, I have not so little good sense as to prefer a new coat to an old friend.’

‘You owe the shabby compliment,’ said I,

laughing, 'to your being mistaken for my uncle's friend.'

'And who is your uncle, sir?'

'Lord Kestral—Mr. Adams,' said I, turning about to my uncle; and with this brief introduction I left them face to face, and hurried to the chariot-window and beautiful Miss Adams.

A lackey opened the door, and Miss Adams, giving me her hand, said, with a radiant smile and a flush of colour that came straight from her warm heart and spread to the edges of her pretty ears:

'Oh, I am so glad to see you!'

But what I replied, or what we talked about for the next five minutes, I cannot recollect. My feelings towards the young lady had cooled down considerably with time; though, like the luminous cloud that is seen at night-time above Vesuvius, a tender glow of sentiment in my idle

moments still reflected the passion that lay dormant in my breast ; but now the sound of her musical voice, the touch of her soft hand, and the sight of her, set all my heart aflame.

She wore—as I found out afterwards, for at that time I saw nothing but her sparkling eyes—a gipsy hat of some white straw, tied with a blue silk handkerchief beneath her chin. Her dark silky hair was arranged in soft curls upon her white brow, and a tiny ringlet from the nape of her neck peeped coquettishly from the edge of her bonnet. Her dress was of white muslin over a blue silk ; her gloves were of the newest mode, being long and loose, of a delicate turquoise blue kid, reaching to the elbow ; and her tippet of white satin, which fell no lower than the lace edge of her short sleeves, was lined with blue of the same shade. These particulars I noticed, wondering if it was her

dress that lent a charm to her, or she that made the dress more attractive than that of any other well-dressed young gentleman I had ever seen.

I withdrew from the door when Mr. Adams came up with Lord Kestral, and stood at a little distance, regarding my simpering relative with feelings of the most homicidal character. My friends were just the sort of people he would like to know. He had already made himself agreeable to Mr. Adams. He would sponge upon them, flatter them, and, behind their backs, ridicule the simple habits of Mr. Adams and the unworldly ideas of Miss Adams amongst his own particulars. It seemed to me, in the exalted state of my mind at that moment, a sacrilege that he should address Miss Adams in terms of equality. I regretted that I had introduced him to Mr. Adams, that I had not rather

taken means to prevent any acquaintance between them ; if, at that moment, my wish could have swept him to perdition, his mortal career would have terminated there and then.

‘ I must introduce you to my daughter, sir,’ said Mr. Adams. ‘ My daughter Delia, sir ; my love, Mr. Falkland’s uncle.’

It was some satisfaction to my jealous spirit to know that his lordship would not relish this distinction.

Lord Kestral made some washed-out compliment, to which Miss Adams replied with much vivacity—though I forget what she said—and then, peeping round the corner, she said to me :

‘ You are coming home with us, aren’t you ?’

‘ My dear,’ said Mr. Adams, ‘ we must first know if Mr. Falkland is not engaged to his uncle.’

‘ I am perfectly free,’ said I ; and with

haste added, 'My lord has already given me my *congée*, having a visit to pay to friends in Soho.'

'Well,' says Mr. Adams, 'I'm for doing by my neighbour as I would have him do by me; so I won't try to persuade your uncle to come with us to Park Lane instead of going to his older friends in Soho. Nevertheless, I shall hope to see you, sir, at my house whenever you feel disposed to visit us. We are at home every Tuesday and Saturday; and if you do us the honour of coming with our other friends, I promise you shall find the best of everything at your service.'

I know that my uncle was exceedingly mortified at this result of my intervention, for he would have liked nothing better than to rest his legs in a chariot and spend his evening in a well-furnished house so near his lodgings; whereas now he must walk

home, or go to the expense of hiring a coach if he found one; for as to visiting friends in Soho, that was clearly an excuse to get rid of me in passing through a genteel quarter, seeing that, if he really had friends in that neighbourhood, the hour was too late to permit of his calling upon them in a promiscuous fashion. He cast a malignant glance at me; but otherwise he kept his countenance admirably, despite his disappointment, accepting the prospective invitation with a condescending grace and a kind of 'I-will-if-I-can air,' and smiling blandly as he saw Mr. Adams and me sink into the luxuriously cushioned seats. He stood on the footway, with one hand in his breast and his best leg turned out, until the chariot began to move, when he lifted his hat with an elegance which Lord Chesterfield himself would have envied.

Mr. Adams replied to this salute with a

series of genial little nods, and, putting his head out of the window when we were some yards off, cried, 'Don't forget Tuesday night, squire !'.

'Squire !' Had his lordship been called by the nickname of his boyhood, he could not have suffered a greater outrage.

For my part, as we drove off and I found myself alone in the presence of these two agreeable friends, and face to face with one whose eyes seemed to reflect my own happiness, I forgot all about my uncle, and a sensation of indescribable relief and delight filled my mind.





CHAPTER XI.

MR. ADAMS AND HIS DAUGHTER IN TOWN.

HAVE you dined yet, sir?' asked Mr. Adams with sudden anxiety, as we neared his house.

'Yes,' said I, 'on Sunday I take my meals at my lodgings, and eat when it pleases my landlady to serve me. To-day I dined at two.'

'I'm glad of it, for though I warrant the larder is not empty, I could have offered you nothing in style. On week-days we take our dinner at supper-time, and our supper for lunch the next morning. 'Tis

the fashion, sir, and so I like it; but I make it a rule, as we have no visitors on Sunday, to live that day in a homely fashion and dine at mid-day, that the cook may have rest for one afternoon in the week. If I was a servant, I should feel it a hardship to have to work all days alike and never get a holiday; and it seems to me that if our servants do their best to please us, we ought to go out of our way a bit to please them now and then.'

Miss Adams raised her pretty eyebrows, and looked out of the window with a little air of dissatisfaction for a minute; and then, turning to me, she said:

'Do you like dining at mid-day?'

'Tis a matter of great indifference to me,' said I. 'When I am at work I eat when I am hungry, and I enjoy my food then.'

'That's it, sir!' cried Mr. Adams. 'Lord!

what can be better, when you've done a good spell of work, and feel a sort of craving, to sit down and eat, and cock your eye at what you've done, and remark with pride what part of your work is done well, and what will be the better for a touch here or a touch there ?

‘Do you still drink out of a stone bottle?’ asked Miss Adams, with a little laugh and a little sarcasm.

‘When I am thirsty.’

Miss Adams looked at me for an instant without smiling, and then turned to the window with that slight air of haughty contempt that had amused me in the church; whilst Mr. Adams nudged me, and winked as if to discontinue the conversation, which was unpleasant to the young lady. But, like a spoilt child who has given way to temper and repents, she turned round, after looking at the road for

two minutes, and, with the most winning smile, said :

‘Let us talk of something pleasant—shall we ?’

And so ended that little exhibition of temper.

‘’Tis the best house I could get,’ said Mr. Adams, when we were in the hall, and Miss Adams had gone upstairs to see to her toilet. ‘There’s a dook and duchess o’ one side, and a markis and his family on the other; but they don’t seem particular’y neighbourly. There’s no chatting over the walls, nor dropping in now and then in a friendly way; though I don’t think there’s much to find fault with now. Our Tuesdays and Saturdays seem to be very well liked; you’d be quite astonished at the quantity of refreshments we manage to get through. Quite a lot of people come, you know, though we have only been

open 'about three weeks. Tip-top people, I can assure you, wonderful fine folks indeed!—sir this and the honourable that—and one introduces another, and so we go on. And they seem to be very happy and talkative—among themselves. Of course, I can't understand one half they chat about; and they don't take much interest in the crops, which rather binds us up when we happen to be in a group; so I leaves them pretty much to themselves, and only cut in now and then when I can think of something new to say about the weather, or wish to call their attention to a brand of wine that the merchant partic'lar'y recommends. I do my best to make 'em comfortable; and I've made up my mind to take no notice if I think they're laughing at me. It suits Delia, and that's everything. She likes the excitement and movement, as 'tis

natural a young creature full of life and spirits should. *She* gets on very well. The people have always got enough to say to her, and somehow she finds quite as much to say to them without even going nigh the weather for a subject. She's beloved, as she deserves to be, by the male sex. We don't receive many females; and a good job too, say I, for they're more bound up than their husbands—that stiff, there's no unbending 'em anyhow. Lord, sir, you'd think the house was theirs, and that they'd hired me, to see how they accept any little services I can do 'em. But what does that matter? If you are pleased with the beautiful shapes and colours in a peep-glass, 'tis absurd to feel disappointed because when you take it to pieces you find nothing but a quantity of little worthless, uninteresting bits of coloured glass. And so long as Delia is pleased with the peep-

glass she shall have it. What do you think of the house, sir ?

The hall was spacious, well lit, furnished, and decorated with many rare and beautiful objects of art. I had seated myself in one of the low cushioned chairs, and Mr. Adams had seated himself upon the arm of another. I expressed my admiration of what I saw.

‘ ’Tis nothing to the other rooms. Would you like to look at them while we are waiting for Delia ?

‘ With great pleasure,’ said I, curious to see how people so new to the fashionable world had furnished their house.

Mr. Adams opened a door, and we entered a room which fairly amazed me ; for it was unlike any other room I had ever seen. There were no two things alike in it, and no attempt had been made to furnish it with ordinary regularity. The floor was covered with Indian carpets and skins ;

so was this for its simplicity. Here the floor was waxed and polished in the French mode ; at the upper end was one of the new *pianofortes* and a harp. A low settee, covered with pale blue satin, skirted the walls, from which it was removed by the width of a marble shelf level with the top of the back, on which lay divers books and cases of prints. There was no movable furniture in the room, nor any ornament, save Venetian mirrors placed at intervals, with pictures between.

‘We dance here,’ said Mr. Adams, in a tone of solemnity which was not out of keeping with the severity of the chamber, and the serious character which a performance of that kind would naturally have for a man with such legs and feet as his.

A short passage led us into a spacious and very handsomely built greenhouse that ran along the back of the house, and brought

the two rooms on the right of the hall in communication with the two on the left. The greenhouse was well filled with flowers, and in the midst was an aviary of small singing birds. Mr. Adams was more at home here, and as he took up a pot now and then to nip off a faded flower or a dead leaf, he recovered his genial and familiar tone, which he had lost in passing through the music and dancing-room.

‘I spend a good deal of my time here,’ said he, slipping some withered foliage in his pocket for want of a more suitable receptacle for the litter; ‘for though there’s a garden out there, ’tis no pleasure to me to walk in it. Fancy a garden, sir, with not a cabbage in it! Nothing but potted-out plants and gravel paths. A garden all flowers, to me, is like a dinner of nothing but sweetmeats. I like to turn my eyes from the flowers to the cabbages, and from the

cabbages to the flowers. One sets off the other, and together they fill the mind with a consciousness of God's bounty and His tender care for the meanest as for the noblest of our wants. Lord, sir, of all pictures I love the Dutch ; for there you see that the artist was not limited in his ideas of what is good and beautiful. Look at their cabbages, sir ; you can fancy it possible to break the crisp leaf and smell the wholesome fragrance. To my mind, a row of good healthy round cabbages are as handsome as e'er a row of your verbenias or calcilariouses. Not as I would say a word against flowers, which are faultless in their place, as we see 'em here, and lovely mingled, as we see 'em in nature, amidst the tender green of a grazing field, or in the banks amongst the little herbs where sheep delight to snatch a dainty mouthful as they pass ; but what I can't abide is a garden which is nought but streaks

of gravel and flowers—a garden without cabbages.’

‘Won’t cabbages grow there?’

‘I don’t believe they *would*,’ he said, with a laugh. ‘But Lord, sir, I could no more plant cabbages in my garden than I could smoke a clay pipe in it. Tisn’t genteel, and Miss Dobson tells me the whole neighbourhood would be scandalized by such a proceeding. One can’t so much as sneeze without being noticed by the dook o’ one side or the markis o’ t’other.’

While Mr. Adams talked he trimmed the plants as we passed along, culling here and there a choice flower; and now he paused to arrange them with a few sprigs of foliage, and bind them into a little nosegay with a strip of bast fished out of his breeches-pocket. He had just finished this—seemingly to his satisfaction, as he held it at a distance, and regarded it with one eye and

his head on one side—when there was a rustle at the end of the greenhouse, and Miss Adams stood before us. She had changed her dress for a sack of primrose satin, trimmed with violet. Diamonds sparkled in her ears, around her throat, upon her bosom, and in the violet ribbons on her wrists. Her dress suggested, in an opulent fashion, the blooms and showers of April, and she stood waiting for us with a smile of triumph, as if she knew how beautiful she looked, and how she must be admired. Her fingers were knitted before her ; her bare arms looked like sculptured ivory.

‘Is there e’er a flower that blows so sweet as she?’ Mr. Adams asked of me in a low tone ; then he went to her, and gave her the little nosegay he had made, and she flung her arms about his neck and kissed him impetuously like a child, and then

glanced archly at me to see if I was not envious of his good fortune. I fancy she was pleased with what expression she found in my face, for her eyes lost nothing of their radiant happiness.

‘Faith, dear,’ said Mr. Adams, ‘that is the prettiest dress I have seen you in for a week. Pray, sir,’ added he, turning to me, ‘have the heathens ne’er a goddess of Spring amongst the number that they worship?’

‘None, sir,’ I replied, ‘or they had worshipped her alone.’

Miss Adams made me a bow, and took my arm as well as her father’s as we walked from the greenhouse into the dining-room.

‘I love the springtide above all seasons,’ said Mr. Adams.

‘With its capricious changefulness, its storms, and sullen days,’ said Miss Adams, with mock horror.

‘Aye, with all its faults,’ cried Mr.

Adams; 'for they are but the wayward temper of youth, that one knows will yield to time, and they do but lend a greater charm to the days of sunny brightness and promise. And in thee, my dear, with thy dress of primrose and violet, and thy face of innocence and bright cheery vigour, I seem to see all that is lovable in spring.'

'You are my dearest dear,' murmured she, rising on tiptoe to kiss his leaden-hued cheek.

We passed through the dining-room, and so into the breakfast-parlour, where Miss Dobson was sitting in prim state before the table on which tea was set.

'We live chiefly in this room,' said Mr. Adams, 'and that is why you find Delia's portrait here;' and he pointed to the cast I had given him, which hung over the chimneypiece.

'Have you thanked Mr. Falkland for his present, my dear?' asked Miss Dobson.

‘Mr. Falkland wouldn’t give me an opportunity of thanking him when I wished to, and since then I have lost the inclination,’ said Miss Adams cavalierly ; then, after a moment’s pause, she looked up at me reproachfully, and said, ‘Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.’

‘I did not intend it for you,’ said I ; ‘twas made for myself, and given to Mr. Adams.’

‘And so I told her,’ said Mr. Adams, ‘but she would have it she must thank you for it, and off she went to find you ; and when she came back after her fruitless errand——’

‘Sugar, Mr. Adams?’ said Miss Dobson.

‘Why, there was a hend of it,’ said Mr. Adams, adroitly finishing his story, as, understanding Miss Dobson’s hint, he glanced across the table and perceived that Miss Adams was bending over her cup to conceal the flush of colour which had suffused her

face to the temples. 'Thank you, ma'am, I will take sugar.'

Mr. Adams enjoyed his tea heartily, seeming to appreciate the freedom of talking with me upon subjects which possibly his new acquaintance would not listen to patiently. To me it was a real pleasure to listen to his simple talk of crops, and pigs, and poultry, and his honest, common-sense remarks upon the subject which he knew thoroughly. Only once did Miss Dobson interrupt conversation by asking for his cup, and that was when he got upon the question of manures and their application to the soil. It pleased me also to see the kindly interest that his daughter manifested in the discussion, of which she knew nothing, and must have disliked but for his sake. I perceived also that she had no taste for the meal we were taking, and that she sipped her tea and put food to her lips only when she

thought his eyes were upon her. These little concessions proved to me that indulgence had not spoiled the affectionate disposition of her heart.

When tea was ended, we crossed the hall and entered the drawing-room, which was now lit up with many wax candles, and looked more handsome than ever. The exquisite beauty of everything on which the eye rested ; the tasteful combination of rich colours and perfect forms ; the glitter of light as it fell upon cut crystal, enamels, porcelain, and fretted metals ; the union of richness and splendour in art with the simplicity and tenderness of growing flowers, and withal the perfect harmony in which these various objects were blended together, renewed my admiration and astonishment. It seemed to me like a chamber in an enchanted palace, such as I had read of in 'Tales of the Arabian Nights,' or in the

fantastic stories of the Countess d'Anois, but could not realize as existing except in the poet's fancy. When Miss Adams seated herself on a deep, throne-like chair covered with embossed purple velvet, the deception was complete ; there sat the princess in the midst of her splendours.

'Fore J'ovah's, if you please, Miss Dobson,' said Mr. Adams, seating himself with an air of tranquil delight.

I was at a loss to understand the meaning of this strange request, until Miss Dobson, having passed into the adjoining room and seated herself at the piano, began to play a sacred piece which I recognised as 'Before Jehovah's awful Throne.'

'I do like to listen to sacred music o' Sundays,' said Mr. Adams to me, in a low tone. 'It kind of loosens the heart, and makes one feel how much there is to be grateful for in this world. And I can't tell you how happy

I feel now—almost too happy, for I fear 'tis more than I have a right to expect.'

Miss Adams rose from her seat, and coming to us, put her hand on her father's shoulder, and asked what he was talking about.

'I was saying, sweetheart, how happy this music makes me.'

'Then it shall be of my playing,' said she, with sudden jealousy; and, Miss Dobson being come to the end of her performance, she took her seat at the pianoforte and played. Mr. Adams and I followed her into the room, and watched her.

I know not what it was she played, for she had no music; it was some quaint old hymn tune that her father liked, and it stirred her heart as it stirred ours, for her face wore an aspect of pathetic tenderness as the melody flowed on, and all unconsciously she began to sing the words to

which the tune was put, in a low and rich contralto. But her mood quickly changed, and she proceeded to play snatches of livelier tunes, without any connection, until Miss Dobson reminded her that it was Sunday; when she rose from her seat in a pet, flung away from the instrument, and took me round the room to look at the pictures, leaving the elder lady to repeat 'Fore J'ovah's' for her own and Mr. Adams's amusement. But here, again, her amiable disposition asserted itself; she looked at the pictures in an absent manner for a few minutes, and suddenly left me, to run back to the pianoforte and kiss her governess; after that atonement for her hastiness, she came back to my side and gave herself up, heart and soul, to the enjoyment of the paintings.

'What do you do with the pictures you paint?' I asked, for there were none upon the walls.

‘Keep them in my work-room,’ she answered. ‘I don’t want anyone to see them—except papa, and Miss Dobson, and you, until I know whether they are good or bad. I hate to be flattered—that is,’ she said, checking herself conscientiously, ‘I hate to find I have been flattered for something that didn’t deserve flattery. I will show you everything I have done; and I won’t be angry even if you laugh at my work.’

‘I shall never do that,’ said I.

‘Not if a pillar gets in my way, or I try to match the colours of nature as if they were the bows of a bonnet?’ she asked slyly.

‘No,’ said I. ‘If you did what you knew was not right in art, or anything else, I might be very sorry, or very angry; but I could not laugh at that.’

She looked up at me as a few minutes before I had seen her look at a picture which we both admired; but she said

nothing, and we continued to regard the paintings for some moments in silence. Then she said :

‘ I cut up that picture as you advised me to do, and I’ve tried to paint in harmony with my feelings.’

‘ To your satisfaction ?’

‘ I think so—but I failed terribly the first time. My goldfinch was neglected, and it died, and I can’t tell you how I suffered. Then I thought, now is the time to paint a pathetic picture, and I tried to paint my dead goldfinch ; but I couldn’t—every stroke of the brush seemed to cut into my heart.’

‘ So you gave it up ?’

‘ Yes ; ’twas useless to continue——’

‘ And then——’

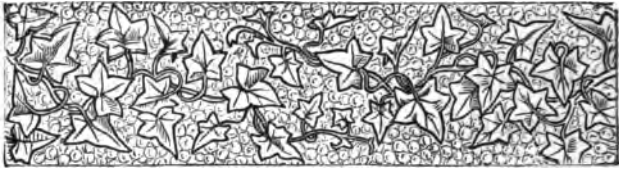
‘ I set to work upon a pot of heartsease that papa in his thoughtful, loving way brought to give me comfort ; and as I painted, the flowers seemed to smile at me

and I felt such relief and pleasure in my work that—I think 'tis the best picture I have ever painted. But you shall see it, and we will have long talks about pictures and statues—there's a prodigious deal I want to tell you. And you will come very often now, won't you ?

‘As often as I may.’

She took my arm—it was her method of expressing gratitude, I saw—and gave a little sigh of satisfaction, like a child who gains her own way and sees the near realization of her wishes.





CHAPTER XII.

A BROAD HINT IS DROPPED BY MR. ADAMS,
AND CAUGHT BY FALKLAND.

THE hours slipped away so agreeably that I took no note of them, and might have continued to let them pass in the same manner had not Miss Dobson, looking at her watch, said :

‘I positively think my watch must have stopped. Will you have the goodness, Mr. Falkland, to give me the correct time ? for I cannot believe it is but twenty minutes past one.’

‘Twenty minutes past one !’ we ex-

claimed, all in one breath, incredulously. 'Surely, ma'am, your watch has advanced rather than stopped,' I added. And so thought both Mr. Adams and his daughter, until on comparing their watches it was found that she was substantially correct, being only ten minutes fast.

I rose and bade Miss Adams good-night at once, but best part of another hour slipped away before we finally separated, and in that time we shook hands fully half a dozen times to part; but the little siren had the art to make an observation or ask a question at the very last moment which provoked discussion and kept us lingering on, to the great distress of Miss Dobson, who flitted about in the background with a chamber-candlestick like a perturbed somnambulist.

Miss Adams would have had the carriage brought out for me; but as the night was fine, I preferred to walk home, and Mr.

Adams insisted upon accompanying me, saying that, like the ghosts, he could walk after midnight. Mr. Adams linked his arm in mine, and, after expatiating upon the beauty of the night and the delight of stretching one's legs, he lapsed into silence, and we both walked for some time without saying one word. I think our thoughts were occupied on the same subject ; I know well that I could not disengage myself from the memory of the sweet girl, whose parting ' Good-night ' haunted my mind like the recollection of a strain of music mutely repeating itself again and again.

' Would it be impertinent to ask you, sir, if you are connected with the Falkland family who lived in the house at Maplehurst which is now mine ? ' asked Mr. Adams. ' If 'tis a question you would rather not answer, I beg you to tell me so, and to forgive me for my imprudence.'

‘I have no reason to conceal the fact,’ said I. ‘It was my father’s house, and was sold at his death. I was born there, and lived there until I was eighteen.’

‘Then Delia was right. We saw as clear as could be that you were a gentleman by birth; and she was sure, by your manner, that the house was familiar to you, and that you loved it for something more than its good looks. Then she found out from the folks in the village that Mr. Falkland and his son had gone abroad, and that you had been engaged by accident, as it were, to repair the stone in the church; and so, putting one thing and another together, she hit upon the truth, you see, sir.’

Knowing that idle curiosity had not prompted Mr. Adams to ask for a confirmation of this suspicion, I asked him point-blank for his motive.

‘Why, sir,’ said he, with a little confusion,

‘I was thinking to myself how grievous it must have been to you to see your old house in the possession of strangers, and how happy you would be if the house should come again into your hands—which is quite possible,’ he hastened to explain, ‘seeing that you are bound to make your fortune with your talents and your energy.’

‘Even then it will depend upon your will to dispose of the property.’

‘Have no fear on that point, sir; for lucky as I count myself to have such a genteel house, I should consider myself more lucky still in turning it over to you. I would rather be your guest in that house than your host, I do assure you. I promise you, sir, there shall not be a brick in that house altered.’

I thanked him as best I could for his kindness—inadequately, so far as my feelings were represented—for I could not

but marvel at his abounding generosity. I expected after this that he would ask some questions about my occupation—which had only once during the evening been mentioned ; but his thoughts were evidently upon another track, for when he again spoke it was on a subject remote from that we had been discussing.

‘ You don’t know Captain Hasher, I suppose, Mr. Falkland ?’

‘ I have not that pleasure.’

‘ Nor the Honourable Mr. Sparks ?’

‘ No.’

‘ Ah, I thought not ; they are scarcely in your way. You’ll see ’em on Tuesday. They’ve took a wonderful fancy to me, but somehow I don’t seem to be able to take quite such a fancy to them. I can’t tell you why, sir, but I don’t. They are very much liked, and I’ve never heard a word against ’em ; but still, you know, I don’t take to

them as they take to me. They brought a horse round for me, and would have me go for a canter with 'em ; and when I came a cropper—never having rode a horse in my life before—they didn't laugh like all the rest of the spectators, but fetched a coach and took me home, and wouldn't leave me till I'd been examined by a surgeon. That was very considerate, you know.'

I assented, wondering what sort of villains they were in appearance.

'Yet hang me if I can like 'em,' he observed.

'Does Miss Adams share your antipathy ?'

I asked, with jealous hope.

'No, I don't think she dislikes 'em. They are very attentive to her, very lively, very submissive, and chuck-full of compliments, so it isn't natural she should find fault with 'em.'

'She likes them, in fact.'

'Well, yes, sir. I think I may say she likes 'em better than any of the others.

You'll see, sir, on Tuesday ; they swarm about her like bees about a ripe peach. There's a meaning in that, of course, though I doubt if Delia sees it. They amuse her, and I believe it would be all the same if they were just so many bears and monkeys. In some things she is still quite a child. I am sure she does not know what love really is, though she hears such a lot about it—with their hearts and darts, and cupids and flames, and I know not what all.' Mr. Adams spoke with great disgust in his tone. 'As she understands love, 'tis admiration on the part of the man, and on hers an affection of the kind she feels for me ; and there's not one amongst 'em for whom she cares so much as she does for old Miss Dobson. But the change is coming, sir. There's signs of it which haven't escaped me. I can see it just as I could see the change in the bud on an apple-tree before the bloom bursts. And 'tis

a critical moment in a woman's life, as 'tis in the smaller matter of a flowering tree. The day is close at hand when she will be a woman and no longer a child, and all her love for flowers, and singing birds, and painting, and music—aye, even her affection for me—will be as nothing at all to her love for the man she is to wed. And that's why I am fearful when I see her more partial to this man than that, and why I wanted to know something about Captain Hasher and the Honourable Mr. Sparks, for fear she should take and give her heart, with all its treasures, to some one who isn't worthy to have it.'

'Is it not possible to lessen the risk by shutting your doors against men like the two you have mentioned whom you dislike?' I asked.

Mr. Adams reflected sufficiently long for me to see the folly of my suggestion, which

was made at the impulse of jealousy, before he replied :

‘No, sir,’ said he ; ‘I may be wrong, but I cannot think you are right ; nor do I think you would do otherwise than I am doing, was you in my place, and did you know Delia as I do. You may be sure I gave this matter much consideration before I resolved to quit the country, and bring my child into this kind of life ; and I argue, sir, that you can’t make a plant grow straight and healthy by merely bracing and tying of it up ; you can do more by giving it freedom and air, and nourishing the healthy growth of its roots. I believe that in all healthy young girls there is a tendency to do right, and that we underrate their wisdom by overrating our own. But for a girl to do right and be wise, she must know the difference between the bad and the good, and that she can only know by comparing the one with

the other. If Delia has not already found out how worthless and contemptible are the Pinks and Jackanapes who make fools of themselves to please her, believe me she will the moment she compares them with a man of sense and feeling. Oh, I have no fear,' he added, with the conviction of his own argument. 'Delia has too much pride to accept either Captain Hasher or the Honourable Mr. Sparks.'

'That depends, according to your own theory, upon the existence of a better man amongst the number of her admirers.'

'Oh, he exists,' replied Mr. Adams, laughing, 'or I am greatly mistaken in the looks of things.'

This hint was so broad that I could no longer be in doubt as to the good man's drift, though I protest it was so entirely unanticipated that I could not for some time realize the fact. A beggar may look at a banquet

with covetous eyes, and yet never flatter himself with the hope that he may be invited to sit down to it.

Years of adversity had used me to regard my position as one which could be improved only by a long term of patient study and work ; as for marriage, I had looked upon that as I had looked upon Fame—as a golden possibility of the future, uncertain of attainment, and entirely dependent upon favouring conditions. Not for one moment had I contemplated the possibility of marrying Miss Adams. I had fallen in love with her at first sight, without considering whether she was maid or wife. It would have made no difference to my feelings then had she been married,—my case had been no more hopeless. But as my reason would have restrained me from encouraging that love with dishonourable hopes, so in the present case it

had forbidden me to think of altering the relation in which we stood. Yet now at this hint, so readily did my understanding accommodate itself to my inclination, I saw nothing preposterous in the idea of making Miss Adams my wife. In birth and education I was at least her equal. Probably she would receive a large fortune from her father, but I saw no reason for making this an impediment to our marriage. My tastes would never permit me to live idle, and while I worked I should be able to maintain my feeling of freedom and independence; at the same time, she would be free to spend every penny of her fortune as she chose. Of course we must wait; I already took it for granted that she *would* wait. I could not marry on a salary of two pounds a week, terminable at three months; but Mr. Rogers, who seemed thoroughly content with my work, would doubtless double my wages in

re-engaging me, and by the end of the year I might fairly expect to execute some piece of work on my own account which would be saleable, and that would lead to greater things. And my thoughts still running on in this manner, I fell to calculating the sum of money I should have in three or four years, and wondering if that would be sufficient to justify me in demanding Miss Adams's hand. My fancy, which up to the present I had kept under control, had now got the reins out of my holding and fairly bolted with me.

As I made no response to Mr. Adams's hint, he pursued the subject no further; indeed, I believe the poor fellow imagined, from my subsequent silence, that he had gone too far, for he spoke scarcely a word during the rest of our walk—a fact which gave me no concern at the time—and when we stopped to part, he said in a tone of anxiety :

‘I do trust, sir, that I have said nought this evening to give you offence.’

‘Offence!’ cried I, grasping his hand; ‘I consider that you have given me the highest mark of respect and confidence that I could possibly receive.’

‘I intended nothing less, I assure you, sir,’ said Mr. Adams impressively; ‘and ’tis a further proof of my esteem that I spoke out my mind without either premeditation or reserve. Indeed, sir, I am thinking that such outspokenness is scarcely genteel; but, faith, I find it harder by a vast degree to conceal my thoughts from a man whom I take to be honest and good, than to speak at all openly with a man I mistrust.’

We shook hands cordially, and separated, he returning to Park Lane, and I betaking myself to my bed. And I verily believe that had my pillow been a billet of wood, it would not have impaired the sweetness of my sleep that night.



CHAPTER XIII.

LORD KESTRAL'S INTEREST IN MR. ADAMS ; HIS
EFFORTS TO SAVE HIM FROM HIS FRIENDS.

ROSE with the lark the following morning, and astonished myself no less than my landlady by singing a song which was popular at Oxford when I was a commoner there, and which I believe had never recurred to me since then. My temper was neither sad nor morose, but I had grown quiet and grave, prematurely perhaps, by solitude, long hours of work, and the absence of gaiety from my life. When I was well pleased with my work I would unconsciously fall a-humming ;

but here I found myself bellowing out a song with all the overflowing spirit of a careless lad.

Doubtless Mrs. Jilks conceived that my happiness was the result of having discovered my uncle, and seeing me on the highway to fortune, felt more kindly disposed towards me than before; in proof of which she sent up a herring with my breakfast, and a polite message begging me to accept it, as she had received a box from her brother at Yarmouth.

In the course of the morning I called upon the tailor who was making my new suit, and exacted a promise from him that it should be sent to my lodgings that night. At the same time I bought a pair of new shoes, a very handsome frilled shirt, a pair of black silk stockings, and a new riband for my hair. I believe no girl could have felt more pleasure in the prospect of wearing a fresh

gown, than I had in thinking of the figure I should cut in my new finery; and the moment my work at the studio was finished, I hastened home with a view of trying on my suit.

‘Lord Kestral desires to see you; his lordship bade me tell you the moment you arrived,’ said my landlady, mouthing my uncle’s title like an unctuous morsel, as she opened the door to me.

‘Is he upstairs?’ I asked, heartily wishing him at the bottom of the sea.

‘No; his lordship is in his own apartment’—and, she added, dropping her voice to a low and confidential tone, ‘Taken my parlour-floor—must be near you—offered me a year’s rent in advance—didn’t take it, you may be sure.’

‘More fool you,’ thought I, as I gloomily left my landlady and went to the parlour.

I found my uncle in a somewhat faded

but very elegantly brocaded night-gown, reclining in an elbow-chair, with a copy of the *Times* on his knee and a bottle of Madeira upon the table at his side.

‘ Ah ! my dear, glad to see you,’ he said with urbanity, as he held out a couple of fingers without altering his position in the chair. “ *Omnia vincit amor, et nos cedamus amori ;*” as we used to say. Here we are united under one roof.’

‘ I had no notion, sir, that you intended leaving your lodgings in Bond Street,’ said I coldly.

‘ Nor I—take a seat, my dear—until this morning, when my man Pilcher told me that the woman of this house was anxious to let her parlour-floor to a person of quality ; it struck me at once that here was a chance of doing you a service. And the rascal of whom I have rented my late lodgings for five years coming at that moment with his

bill, and giving his tongue undue liberty when I declined to pay, I took the opportunity to punish his ingratitude by bidding him find a more suitable tenant at once. I came here ; the room suited me ; the woman behaved herself with becoming civility ; I sent Pilcher to fetch away my possessions—which, by-the-bye, are but a beggarly account of empty boxes—and entered into possession without more ado.'

'I fail to see how your presence here is to benefit me,' said I, giving free vent to my ill-humour.

'What! D'ye forget our conversation yesterday? Have you forgot all I promised to do for you?'

'No, my lord ; but apparently you forget that I refused to have any share in your project.'

'If I do, 'tis because your refusal is not worth remembering ; and because,

as a man of the world, I consider myself a better judge than you of what is to your advantage. To begin with, no man in London can rise to eminence without patrons. 'Tis the wealthy alone who can purchase your works, and they will have nothing to do with you if 'tis known that you have declined the friendship and assistance of your uncle from no explicable motive, except that of a churlish contempt for the aristocracy. Mind, I do not threaten—far be it from me, whatever treatment I receive at your hands, to cry down your talents and sneer at your character; I only wish you to see clearly what must be the inevitable consequence of your neglecting my proposal. I am a little too old to be hurt by ingratitude, my dear; but I feel hurt to think that my nephew should be tainted with so mean a vice.'

‘My lord!’ cried I, springing from my chair.

‘Did I hesitate to put my hand in my pocket when I met you in the Park, and thought you needed my help? Did I decline to accept your boiled mutton? Did I conceal my circumstances from you? Did I not at once offer you my help? Have I failed in any respect to do for you the best that lay in my power?’

I was constrained to apologize to my uncle for my shortcomings, though I was conscious of doing so with a bad grace; for I saw nothing in his conduct which might not have been done with perfect selfishness on his part.

‘Let us say not another word,’ said my uncle. ‘We understand each other now. Take a glass from amongst that rubbish on the sideboard, and give me your opinion of this Madeira. I am giving the local trades-

men a trial.' (I imagined what sort of trial it would be for them.) . ' And now let us talk about our prospects. By-the-bye, it seems you have already set your foot on the first step of the ladder. You told me nothing about these friends of yours—the Adamses. I have heard speak of the man—a well-meaning, profuse, rather vulgar person, I am told. Made his money, like so many others, in trade—candles, I hear ; and left Thames Street to live in Park Lane. Unfortunately, these people can never quite get rid of the smell of the shop. I suppose, now, his talk is of markets and tallow, eh ?'

' I never heard him mention either.'

' He shows better taste than I expected, then. 'Tis strange how locality will cling to a man. Have you ever noticed that, my dear ?'

' I can't say that I have.'

' Now this Adams, who has lived best

part of his life, as we know, in Thames Street, don't you find him popping the Monument and Fish-street Hill into his observations very frequently ?

‘ On the contrary, sir ; if one were to judge of his habits by his observations, you would say that he had lived in the country all his life, and given his thoughts to cultivation.’

‘ That's curious !’ said my uncle, who was holding his glass between the light and his eye. He tossed off the contents, and asked me, smacking his lips, what I thought of it.

I replied I thought it was very good wine.

‘ And how did you come to know this tallow-merchant ?’ he asked, half filling his glass.

I gave him as brief an outline of the facts as I could.

‘ Well, my dear,’ said he, when he had

heard all he could get from me on that subject, 'you are to be congratulated. You have by an extraordinary series of accidents arrived, in a few days, at a position which months of patient endeavour might have failed to attain. One object of this tallow-merchant' (it seemed to me that my uncle took a pleasure in constantly referring to Mr. Adams's former trade as some sort of retaliation for being dubbed 'Squire' the evening before)—'of this tallow-merchant is to marry his daughter well. The ambition of these men is to marry their children into aristocratic families—families with a title, if possible. Now, I should not be in the least surprised if this Mr. Adams will do all he can to make up a match between his daughter and you, now that he finds you are my heir. Money is no object to him, of course; but rank and breeding are. A self-made man has never any

family—you have not heard of any relatives of position?

‘None.’

‘Ha!’—my uncle emptied his glass again—‘he would have let you know if he had any. Was one inclined to be jocose, it might be said that a self-made man has no need of ancestors—he, he!’ He wiped a tear from the corner of his eye, and took up the thread of his discourse. ‘As I was saying, he hopes, by the prettiness of his daughter—for I perceived she had a certain kind of prettiness of the middle-class sort—and by a good dowry, to obtain a footing in our circle of society. That is the idea of this Mr. John Adams—I think you told me his name is John?’

‘No; I do not know his Christian name.’

‘Not John! Egad, I could have sworn you said it was! My cursed memory is constantly playing me tricks of this kind.’

Well, whether you marry the girl or not must depend upon your own inclination. But I trust you will be in no haste to snap up the first tempting bait laid in your way. With your figure, your prospects, and the position you will shortly make, you may easily form a creditable as well as profitable alliance. Miss Adams may be very charming, very amiable, and very fascinating, and Mr. Adams may do his very best to be agreeable, but——'

'Sir,' said I, rising in heat, for I could no longer sit tamely to hear my friends vilified, 'you misapprehend the character of my friends entirely; and mine also, if you think it gives me any pleasure to hear you speak ill of a man, and he the most simple and honest I have ever met.'

'Oh, you think him simple and honest! Then let me tell you I am delighted to hear

you confirm the opinion I had formed of him.'

My uncle spoke with such evident satisfaction that I was completely amazed. I could only account for this sudden change in his tone by supposing that he had purposely sneered at my friends with a view to eliciting my opinion of them.

'As to speaking ill of Mr. Adams,' he continued, 'nothing, I protest, is farther from my intention. It would be just as unwise to speak well of him in the present state of my knowledge. I have spoken to the man only once in my life, and I know nothing of him except at second-hand. I am not such a fool as to blame him for trying to rise above the level of tallow and Thames Street; I should consider him worthy only of contempt if he did not. Nor can you think I intend to cast a slur upon his character by supposing that he would like

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ate, and then he said :
'I am not ill-pleased to see
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perhaps I feel hurt that you have
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I may convince you that my disposition
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at Will's this afternoon, with the purpose of
finding out who and what this Mr. Adams
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credulously, but the fact is self-evident.



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...ey have stripped him to the bone.'
...cle spoke with fierce excitement,
...the perspiration from his face,
...a thought of the pigment that came
...with it.

to marry his daughter to you. And this is the sum of all I have said. Do you find anything to justify you in looking at me as if I were a fiend incarnate ?

I had no answer to make, for indeed, it was the manner rather than the matter of his discourse which offended me. My uncle allowed me to feel my discomfiture for a minute, and then he said :

‘ I am not ill-pleased to see you take the part of your friends so warmly, though perhaps I feel hurt that you have no indulgence for me. Sit down, my dear, and I may convince you that my disposition is not so sinister as you think it. I called in at Will’s this afternoon, with the purpose of finding out who and what this Mr. Adams is. Everybody had heard of him ; nobody knew him. Not one decent member of society visits him. You may smile incredulously, but the fact is self-evident.

The better sort of people decline to visit him, not because he himself is objectionable, but because the company he keeps is bad. His house is open to any rascal who chooses to go there, and all are welcomed without distinction. His rooms are crowded with a mob of needy adventurers, swindlers, sharpers, and thieves, who go there to bubble him out of his money. They have but to present a plausible scheme, and he supports it ; rotten speculations, sham subscriptions, worthless undertakings, he subscribes to with a reckless generosity that is not more ridiculous than it is culpable. He has given himself up a prey to wolves and jackals, and, mark me, they will not leave him till they have stripped him to the bone.'

My uncle spoke with fierce excitement, and wiped the perspiration from his face, without a thought of the pigment that came away with it.

‘This is hardly consistent,’ said I, ‘with his character as a successful merchant. Men who make money in trade owe it to the prudence of their transactions.’

‘That is true,’ replied my uncle, with a grisly smile ; ‘that is what I said to myself. We must suppose that he was prudent in tallow, and knew nothing of the world outside Thames Street. You say he is a simple, honest man ; that explains the matter sufficiently for us. Here are the facts : ignorant of society, he cannot distinguish between the real aristocracy and its base representatives ; by admitting the latter to his friendship he excludes the former from it, and, with not a hand to stay him, he is going helter-skelter to ruin. I was told only last week he gave a thousand guineas towards the abolition of slavery—a revolutionary and impious scheme that, thank God, will never be sanctioned by the

Government of this country while we have a Christian King at the head of it—and five hundred to a designing wretch who would destroy the industry of the country by some mechanical contrivance. These rascals play cards at his house ; and for high stakes, you may warrant, for the loser gets his note of hand cashed by Mr. Adams, who takes the worthless bit of paper as his sure gage for repayment. Money to this one, money to that one, wine to all—reckless extravagance and wicked waste everywhere ; the whole of that immense fortune being scattered with both hands to the rapacious horde that surrounds him. 'Tis frightful to think of !

Again my uncle wiped the moisture from his face, and hideous wrinkles showed themselves at the angles of his eyes, adding to the expression of greedy envy upon his face.

‘ But it must be stopped, this wholesale

pillage and devastation,' he cried, striking the elbow of his chair; 'and we must stop it at once, while there is yet something to be saved from the wreck!'

'If Mr. Adams is being imposed upon, it is only necessary to make him acquainted with the nature of those who are taking advantage of his simplicity——'

'Not so fast, not so fast!' said my uncle, throwing himself back in his chair, closing his eyes and knitting his brows. 'If we are too sudden, we shall ruin all. 'Tis the nature of such men to trust everyone implicitly, or trust no one at all. He is capable of turning us out with the rest; of shutting up his house, and flying off to the other end of the world. We must oust these adventurers one by one, and gradually introduce better people in their place.'

'How is that to be done?' I asked.

'How is that to be done?' he repeated, in

a tone as calm and deliberative as lately it had been tempestuous. 'In the first place, we must get women to visit the house. There is a stigma upon every society where men preponderate. At present no women visit that house but those who are compelled by their husbands or fathers to go, in order to support their schemes.'

'I cannot see how you will get women to go voluntarily amongst men of bad character.'

'If one goes, others will follow ; and Lady Kestral shall be the first. I will go to Southgate to-morrow morning and fetch her, and she shall accompany me in the evening. That will be the beginning.'

I was astounded. Was it possible that Lord Kestral had resolved upon this extraordinary measure out of consideration for the Adamses or for me ? I looked in his face, and saw no trace of philanthropy there.



CHAPTER XIV.

LADY KESTRAL.

MY uncle said no more : he kept his eyes closed, and presently gave signs of having fallen asleep. Possibly he adopted this simple means of terminating an explanation which he thought was sufficient for his present purposes. I went up to my room, and for a long time sat in silent cogitation upon Lord Kestral's character, his conduct, and his intentions ; but as my reflections resulted in no satisfactory explanation of the circumstances that so perplexed me, I will pass them by,

and proceed with the narrative of events that followed.

I saw no more of my uncle until the following evening, when I returned from the studio, impatient to change my clothes and betake myself to Park Lane. He himself opened his parlour-door as I was passing through the passage.

‘Come in here, my dear,’ said he. ‘I have to introduce you to Lady Kestral, your aunt.’

Lady Kestral was seated near the window, with her back to the light; I could distinguish at the moment only her fine dark eyes and pale face. She looked at me attentively for some seconds, as if to see if I resembled my uncle, maybe, without moving from her seat; then she rose, and advancing to meet me, held out her hand frankly, saying, with a smile, that she was agreeably surprised to find that I was so unlike—she

paused for an instant, while her eyes half turned towards Lord Kestral, and continued—so unlike the nephew she had expected.

‘I am glad to see,’ said Lord Kestral, with a sneer, ‘that your long contact with *Quakers* has not dulled the edge of your wit.’

‘Oh, I assure you, my lord, I find these sober folks not half so dull as those who endeavour to be facetious,’ said Lady Kestral with perfect good-humour, as she took a seat on the sofa, and drew her skirts aside to make room for me.

I had pictured my aunt a tall, spare, fair woman, I know not why, and expected to see a face thin and careworn, with strong lines of character, and visible traces of the hardship and disappointments she had suffered ; I found her unlike my idea in all respects. She was short, though the classic smallness of her head and the symmetry of her body gave her the appearance of height ;

her complexion was dark and colourless ; she had large brown eyes which moved slowly with a kind of coquettish lingering ; her cheeks had almost a girlish fulness, and the only signs of character and of past suffering were in the lips and the faintly perceptible lines about them.

It was difficult, as I looked at her, to believe that she was really forty, for she looked eight or ten years younger. She wore a dress of some light material, and of the dove-colour that Quakers affect ; but it was admirably fitted to her pretty bust and shapely arms. A snowy frill around her throat and wrists was the only approach to ornament about her.

My uncle made no reply to his wife's sarcasm, for, like most people who are over-ready to be satirical, he was very quickly silenced by a sharp retort. He seated himself in his elbow-chair, and I could fancy,

by the vicious manner in which he leered at her, that he was ruminating on the bitter things he might have said, and would say, if she would only give him a second chance. He wore a nightcap, for his 'head' had been sent away to be dressed, and his face was in an early stage of preparation for the evening. It had been washed, and his yellow skin and many wrinkles added to the likeness which his narrow retreating forehead, his bleared small eyes, and his long hooked nose, presented to the head of some hideous carrion bird. He watched his wife without stirring a muscle as she exchanged with me a few conventional compliments, and at the first pause in our conversation said :

'I am sorry, my dear, that you should see Lady Kestral at a disadvantage; but the fact is, she is sadly out of temper at having to visit our friend, Mr. Adams, this evening.'

'Yes, and I am still more annoyed now

that I know you, Mr. Falkland,' said she. 'Tis nothing short of an insult to your friend to attend his assembly in such a dress as this; and now I suffer in knowing that I must involve you in my discredit. Before,' she added, with a cavalier shrug of her shoulders, and looking full at Lord Kestral, 'I had only my own feelings to consider.'

Lord Kestral smiled, and nodded his head twice or thrice in acknowledgment of this compliment, whilst he wetted his lips once or twice, as if preparing them for a scathing reply.

'As I have no gloves to cover my red hands'—Lady Kestral extended her hands, which were very plump and well formed, and sufficiently white—'I may escape observation. It may be thought I am his lordship's nurse.'

'You will take that purse,' cried my lord,

with no pretence to amiability in either his voice or gesture, as he threw his purse on the table, 'and get whatever gloves and fallals are necessary before nine o'clock. We have ordered a hack to be here at ten,' he added, turning to me ; 'will that hour suit you ?'

'Sir,' said I, 'I promised Mr. Adams to be at his house by eight ;' and turning to Lady Kestral as I rose, I begged her to accept this engagement as an excuse for leaving her ; and so I made my escape from the room, well content to have found the means.

I had just finished dressing myself, and was looking at myself with some satisfaction, by the aid of a mirror some six inches square, when the little waiting-maid tapped at the door, and presented me with a letter, which she said a porter had that minute brought to the house.

In some astonishment I opened the letter, and with still greater astonishment read the hastily written lines within:

‘ For the love of God, come to me at once, and without letting my husband know of your intention. You will find me at the glover’s, by Marlborough Street. I implore you to burn this letter.

‘ Your unhappy Aunt,

‘ KESTRAL.’

I clapped on my hat, and having burned the letter, descended the stairs and got out of the house without being noticed. I heard my uncle cursing Pilcher as I passed the parlour.

I found my aunt at the glover’s, in the parlour behind the shop, seated before a table writing. The glover’s wife was bustling about, evidently on the alert to find out what was afoot.

‘How good of you to come so soon,’ said my aunt in a low voice, as she pressed my hand, looking into my face with her handsome eloquent eyes. ‘One moment.’ She glanced towards the glover’s wife expressively; and then, having finished her letter, dusted it with pouncet and folded it, she rose, thanked the glover and his wife very graciously for their civility, and taking my arm, left the shop with me. When we were in the street she said, as we walked towards the Oxford Road :

‘Has my husband told you my history?’

‘Yes.’

‘Has he told you that I am a designing, utterly worthless woman?’

‘Yes.’

‘Do you believe him?’

‘I never yet knew a woman who was utterly worthless.’

‘Then I may rely upon your sympathy?’

‘Undoubtingly.’

She was silent for a few paces ; then :

‘Do you know why my husband, after seven years of absolute neglect, has brought me to London?’ she asked.

‘No.’

‘You do not know why he is taking me to Mr. Adams to-night?’ she asked, with some surprise.

‘No ; I cannot guess.’

‘Would you like me to tell you?’

‘I have not the slightest wish to know any secret that concerns my uncle or his affairs.’

She thought for a time before again speaking.

‘Where does Mr. Adams live?’

‘In Park Lane. I am going there now.’

‘Park Lane. It would take me half an hour to get there. No, I cannot go.’ Again

she hesitated. 'I think I must explain my husband's motive, for I wish you to render me a service.'

'Cannot I serve you without the explanation ?'

'If you will.'

'Of course I will.'

'Thank you, George,' she said, with great tenderness ; 'I want you to give this letter to him. Give it into his own hands when he is alone. His own daughter must not see it ; and my husband must know nothing about it.'

I promised to be carefully secret ; and she, thanking me, took the letter from her pocket. She held it dubiously for a moment, as if considering whether she had neglected any precaution ; then she said :

'One last thought. Will you tell me, as nearly as you can, what kind of man Mr. Adams is ?'

I described his simple, honest, unselfish character ; his generous love for his daughter. And then I added some description of his appearance : his tall, ungainly figure ; his big nose and kindly eyes ; his peculiar eyebrows, that met ; and his sallow cheeks, slightly pitted with small - pox. Lady Kestral nodded occasionally as I ran through these particulars, and, with a sigh, put the letter in my hand, in silence, when I concluded.

A few paces brought us into the Oxford Road, and there we separated.

‘ I shall never forget your kindness,’ she said, as we parted, with a show of emotion so much in excess of the occasion, that somehow it reminded me of the fact that she had once been a popular actress.

Mr. Adams met me at his door. He was waiting to receive his visitors, as I found was his custom, to welcome them, to

relieve them of their cloaks and shawls, and to make himself contemptible in the eyes of his guests by other marks of uncultured hospitality. It seemed to me that everything he wore was as new as my own clothes, and our shoes creaked in concert as we moved.

‘You’re the first to arrive,’ cried he, grasping my hand; ‘and I don’t care how long the second is a-coming!’ he added, as we entered the drawing-room. ‘Delia will be down in a few minutes, and we shall have a sociable half-hour together before the grand folks have to be seen to.’

We were quite alone in the drawing-room; and so, as we seated ourselves, I pulled out Lady Kestral’s letter and handed it to him, telling him that I was instructed to give it in secret.

‘Lady Kestral! your aunt! letter for me!’ exclaimed he, looking first at the

letter, then at me, and again at the letter in blank surprise ; ' 'tis vastly kind of her, I'm sure. Well, let us see what she says.'

'The communication is for you alone,' I said.

'Hi, hi, hi !' he ejaculated, removing himself a few inches, and looking at me with a ludicrous air of importance.

He opened the letter, and at the first line his jaw dropped. An expression of consternation gathered upon his face as he read on ; and when he came to the end he crumpled the letter up in his hand, and sat looking before him in silent dismay. I rose from the seat beside him without attracting his notice, so absorbed was he in reflection, and went to the farther end of the room to examine a bronze that had caught my eye.

While I was examining the work of art, the creaking of shoes told me that Mr.

Adams approached ; and I turned about to meet him. He looked hard at me as he came up, and said, in a low tone :

‘Do you know the contents of that letter, Mr. Falkland ?’

‘Not one word of it.’

‘Has your aunt told you anything concerning me or’—he hesitated—‘or anyone connected with me ?’

‘Nothing whatever. I am not curious to inquire into a matter which, I take it, can in no way concern me.’

‘You are quite right in that—it does not concern you. Nevertheless, after what was said between us t’other night, I should like for there to be no sort of concealment or secret between us—nay, I should like to ask your counsel and advice in a piece of business that puts me about sadly, was it not that a motive even stronger than friendship compels me to hold my tongue. Here

comes my Delia—she must know nought of this plaguey mystery. Pray look as if we had not been talking of any such matter.’

And therewith he began to whistle a tuneless tune and look about him with such an artless simulation of indifference, that Miss Adams, coming up with pain in her face, said :

‘Why, dear papa, what is the matter with you ?’

END OF VOL. I.

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